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THE LITERARY HISTORY  
OF ENGLAND

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THE  
LITERARY HISTORY  
OF  
ENGLAND

IN THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH AND BEGINNING  
OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

BY MRS. OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF 'MAKERS OF FLORENCE,' ETC.

- 'Reading maketh a full man.' BACON, *On Study*.  
'A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit embalmed and  
treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.' MILTON, *Areopagitica*.  
'Je ne voyage sans livres, ny en paix, ny en guerre. C'est la meilleure munition  
que j'aye trouvée à cet humain voyage.'—MONTAIGNE, Livre iii. Chap. iii.  
'Books are the legacies that a great genius leaves to mankind.' ADDISON,  
*Spectator*.

IN THREE VOLUMES—VOL. I.

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## PREFACE TO THE NEW ISSUE.

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I AM glad to take the opportunity thus given me to answer one or two of the more important remarks that have been made by critics upon this book. In the first place, as it is most easily to be done, I have to express my great regret for the mistake by which all mention of Lockhart's spirited and admirable *Spanish Ballads* were left out of the notice of his works. The mistake arose from the introduction of him, in the first place, as a critic, with an intention of afterward returning to his general writings—an arrangement which, after some thought, I rejected as troublesome and confusing. Between these two stools fell out one of the most animated and striking of poetical reproductions. Something has been said of the vivid conception of some portions of his novels. The ballads are of the very highest quality in so far as they are translations; and as poetical equivalents, so to speak, in English, of a series of fine originals, they are something more.

It is, however, in respect to Wordsworth that there is most to say. Brought up in his worship and service, I find myself treated as a publican and an infidel by those who consider themselves his expositors in the present genera-



tion; and learn, with astonishment, that the instances of his power which I have chosen please them little more than the exceptions which I have taken. In one particular—that of his Sonnets—I have nothing more to do than to own a personal deficiency which no doubt impairs my judgment, but which it is more honest to confess than to attempt to ignore. A sonnet may be a work of supreme and exquisite art—but it may be, at the same time, almost more than any other form of poetical composition, a strained and artificial medium. And I think the mental faculty is rare which can keep its ear clear and its soul alive as it takes its way through the linked sweetness long drawn out of series after series of such compositions. I am glad that there are so many critics who are capable of this high appreciation, but I am not myself one of them. The severity of the art and its monotony are above my level. I recognize the perfection of a few—but I cannot go farther. It is an individual disability which I can only deplore.

A word more seems to be necessary as to one quotation made, at which various of my critics have taken exception, the little poem about the child and the weathercock, which it seems now has puzzled more, even of the most genuine Wordsworthians, than it has edified. It appears to me to belong to a section of Wordsworth's poems in which he is almost, if not altogether, unrivalled—Victor Hugo's amazing realizations of infantine qualities and gifts being the only others that occur to me as fit to be spoken of in the same breath—with this difference, however, that the great

Frenchman's conceptions are individual, and those of Wordsworth abstract. The great *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality* is the centre of this infantile revelation. It is not, perhaps, for this that it is chiefly prized: but when we separate the little figure in the midst of all these immortalities from the high reflections and suggestions that open heaven and earth about him, we can scarcely help recognizing that our poet has left us no more complete (if any such complete) impersonation. The "six years darling of a pigmy size," conning a thousand parts, trying every way in which life is shaped, unawares, in an unconscious study which is his play and highest delight, is something found out for us by the highest genius amid the most usual, the universal surroundings of our common life, where no one had ever found it before; and the child who takes her little porringer to her brother's grave and eats her supper there, with him, and the boy whose eye caught the weathercock when he was in want of a reason, and solemnly appropriated it, are companion sketches belonging to the greater picture. No one else, so far as I am aware, has perceived and identified the instantaneous adoption of the first visible symbol which occurs, to represent the unseen, which is so natural to that primitive mind, of which the child is our only untrammelled and unabashed exponent. Neither he nor the greatest philosopher could explain that caprice of liking which is, in some respects, the most tragic thing in human nature, continually selecting the worst instead of the best; but the boy eludes his problem triumphantly by a grasp at the first

sign that comes to his hand with a boldness which the rest of us are not equal to. A prosaic parent would probably have administered a lecture or a shake to the little deceiver, but tears of sudden discovery, of divine, compassionate, and tender perception come to the poet's eyes. So we might suppose an angel to smile and weep together at those sudden dashes at a reason by which to justify the preference which has none—those interpositions of motive and meaning after the event, with which humanity attempts to account for its follies.

One further and much smaller piece of self-defence. One of my critics has accused me of so much carelessness as not even to have quoted Wordsworth right. It is an accusation to which, in common, I suppose with most people in whom the crispness of youthful memory has become blunted, I am not unlikely to be open—indeed, I acknowledge, with confusion, a misprint of a verse of Shelley's which has escaped revision; but in the case of the Wordsworth quotations the censure is without foundation, as I find by careful comparison. There are occasional differences, no doubt, in different editions. The quotations were all corrected from a "complete popular edition" referred to for convenience as being in one volume, which was published by Moxon, in 1869.

M. O. W. O.

## PREFACE.

It is with diffidence that the Author of the following volumes offers them to the public. The subject is a great one, and so manifold in its details that it is impossible not to have made omissions in various quarters: and especially in those on which she can pretend to least knowledge, in the graver literature of Science and Philosophy. It was intended originally that the work should extend farther, and come down to the elder figures even of our own times, the poets who are now regnant in England, and the many eminent writers who have but just departed; but the period before our own, which has formed them and us, and which reaches into our own by so many survivals, was found too rich and ample to allow of further additions. The aim of the Author has been throughout rather to give, as fully as she was able, a history of the new departures, in poetry above all, in criticism, in fiction, and, to the extent of her ability, to indicate those which have occurred in history and philosophy—than to undertake an absolute commentary upon every individual writer. She is prepared to be told that

she has passed too lightly over some important names ; and if some lesser ones have escaped her altogether, to receive with humility any strictures which may be pronounced upon her on this account. Her aim has been to set forth the remarkable outburst of new and noble genius by which the end of last century and the beginning of our own was distinguished, and made into a great and individual age in literature. It is hard to cut the line clear across all those intertwinings of human life and influence by which one generation links itself to another ; and consequently the story will be found to overlap the boundaries on both sides, now going too far back, now reaching too far forward. The kind and sympathetic reader will see how this comes about, and how the uneven lines of life—some cut so sadly short, some holding on their course up to old age—cannot fail to leave an irregular outline. For all faults of omission or redundancy, she makes her apology beforehand, with the hope of being able to amend them at some future time

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# THE LITERARY HISTORY OF ENGLAND.

## INTRODUCTORY.

THE literary history of every country follows a course of its own. It is independent to a great measure of the political existence of the race in which it is developed, and except in so far as a period of remarkable intellectual activity in other ways is generally distinguished also by one of the great outbursts of literary genius which recur from time to time, it cannot be said to follow any of the rules of historical progress known to us. Even in this respect there is no fixed rule; for though the glory of the Elizabethan age was a sort of universal flood-tide, swelling the veins of every manner of man, and communicating greatness to every section of the national life, there was no public soul whatever in Germany when the great literature of that country arose at a bound; and few ages have seen more vigour and grace in letters than the period, so little remarkable otherwise, in which Louis Philippe reigned in France. Neither does Literature develop historically as national life does. In the history of men and of commonwealths there is a slow progression, which, however faint, however deferred, yet gradually goes on, leaving one generation always a trifle better than that which preceded it, with some scrap of new possession, some



right assured, some small inheritance gained. From age to age the advance may be small, yet it is appreciable. Great statesmen and little, together work out something for us that we had not possessed before. Even in the countries most behindhand in the race, things which were easy and invariable a hundred years ago have now become impossible. New modifications and conditions arise continually, the public sense is awakened, or it is cultivated, or at all events it is changed. There will of course always be a large and respectable portion of mankind, to whose ideas progress is a mistake, and the old always better than the new; but even this class so far recognises the reality of the new, as to agree that the civilised races cannot retrace their steps, and that the old order, if it remains a thing to sigh for, yet cannot be brought back. "Our little systems have their day;" but that day being over, humanity passes on and cannot return. The reforms from which we have hoped most, the advances for which we have struggled most strenuously, do not produce all the good we expected; but we cannot, nor would we, undo them. In everything there is a current onward, perhaps downward, but never back. In individual life, and all its personal manifestations, it is true enough that the thing that hath been ~~is~~ that that shall be; but in history there is a gradual working out and working on, a certain logic, and some traceable principle of development. The principle indeed changes from time. It comes to a climax. It is a despotism growing and ripening towards a great catastrophe; it is a hot democracy, dropping asunder into anarchy and confusion; it is a struggle of force against force, of kings and populace, of nobles and adventurers, of those who have and those who would have—each working towards destruction or towards consolidation, by means which are dimly or grandly traceable across the ages, but each leading to

something, intended or unintended, which was not before, and which turns the current slowly another way, alters the channel, overflows the boundaries, makes a wilderness of a fruitful field, or turns the sandy desert into shocks of standing corn. All is not absolute good or advantage to the human race; but yet the race is stepping onward, it discovers new powers, it learns new ameliorations, and if it also makes proof of novel sufferings and dangers, it finds new defences and medicines for them. Whether progress makes the general mass of mankind really happier or better, will always be a moot question; but yet it improves their position from one generation to another. It goes on making certain sorts of evil obsolete, as well as certain sorts of good; it overcomes the coarser conditions of life, gives universal protection, better shelter, opportunities before unknown. It is in fact a real progress, even through a thousand drawbacks, and every age leaves some foundation upon which the next can build.

But in the history of literature no such development can be traced. Since the age of Elizabeth how much has been altered in the national life, what convulsions have been gone through, what constitutional changes achieved! From insurrections and beheadings without number, to a constitutional calm, in which a hot word is the fiercest weapon ever used among Englishmen, and an indignation meeting the wildest attempt of the rebellious; from a set of pirate sea-knights robbing the Spanish galleons, to peaceful navies that fill all the ports of the world; from a half settled plantation amid the western mists, to colonies and conquests that circle the whole earth around, what a difference! And perhaps most wonderful of all, if not so imposing, from the rude and homely life in which few softnesses existed, to a miraculous comfort which pervades all classes, even the poorest, and carries to the humblest house conveniences and ameliora-

tions of living of which great Elizabeth herself had no thought. All this is true; but we have not advanced upon Shakspeare; Bacon is still our fountain-head of philosophy, nay, even old Chaucer remains the "well of English undefiled." All the generations of poets and prose writers who have flourished since, and who have had it in their power to start from the point where these great authorities left off, have failed to improve upon their masters.

This is a problem, we think, harder to solve than the scientific puzzles which occupy so many minds; but it is one to which no philosopher has ever yet attempted a solution. In art this strange contradiction of all rules is equally patent, and we are tempted to quote an illustrative anecdote, not *ben trovato* only, like the vanities of Mr. Punch's æsthetic victims, but simply true. "Do you think, perhaps," said an amused critic listening to the condescending comments of a young artist upon Fra Angelico, "that you could do as well?" The youth was modest; he took nothing upon himself; but he knew something about the long results of time, the infinite study which has been given to all the conditions of art since Fra Angelico's time. "I think," he said, "that considering all the progress that has been made since then, and the laws of perspective, and the mysteries of light and shade that we have mastered, and all the work of the generations, it would be no credit to one if one could not aspire to do—better." The hope was most reasonable—nothing could be better founded; surely a highly-trained painter of the nineteenth century must be a small creature indeed if he cannot do better than a poor monk of the fourteenth. And surely a young poet of the same period, trained in all the learning of all the ages, with classic examples at his finger-ends, and all the wealth of native literature to form his standing ground, and the full

command of an enriched and refined language—surely, by all the laws of progress, and every canon of nature, he ought to do better than a poor player of three hundred years ago, with few models, no rules of composition, and no particular training at all.

And yet somehow it is not so. The expectation is not in reality presumptuous, though it seems presumptuous to the point of ridicule. Why? But to this question we can give no answer. The processes of Development and Evolution, of which we have heard so much, are manifestly suspended in Physics since the age of history began, so that nowhere, since men have been able to report or perceive their own progress, has an inch been added to their stature, or a joint to their fingers—a result which must be confusing to the scientific student even on his own ground; but the development of mind has not even remained stationary like that of the body. It has been regulated by some spasmodic force which no one has tried to define, and which acts by great unforeseen impulses of irregular recurrence, of which no one has succeeded in calculating the times or seasons. We scarcely venture, in these days of certainty as to the laws which regulate everything, to quote the old divine description of the wind that bloweth where it listeth. In the nineteenth century it is more philosophical to say that the movements of literary genius are determined by some force of which we have not as yet discovered the conditions, some influence of a volcanic order which lies and broods and smoulders in the bowels of the earth, until the moment comes when its flames burst forth and fling themselves to the skies, and the molten metal pours over hill and plain. But when this eruption may occur, or how it comes about, is unknown to man; neither is it possible to predict—as with its physical parallel it sometimes is possible—by any heavings of the soil or subterraneous moan of force re-

strained, about what time or in what direction the mysterious impulse may be given.

To leave similes aside, nothing is more remarkable in the history of humanity, or less capable of reduction to rule, than are the waves of literary impulse. They neither resemble each other, nor do they move at regular intervals; nor has one, so far as we can perceive, any natural connection in the way of cause and effect with another, or resemblance to it. No two spirits that have ever inhabited this earth have less mental kindred than has Milton to Shakspeare, though he was the natural heir upon whom the mantle of poetry descended, and who wore the crown after our sovereign poet. And through all the succession of the ages the same fact is apparent: Dryden had it next, then Pope—inferior princes, with no such imperial rank as their predecessors, but equally unlike them; and who could estimate the unsimilarity, the antagonism on every point, between Pope and Wordsworth? The mind and the form and the meaning change from one generation to another so entirely, that in each it seems a new thing, a separate creation, instead of a succession and hereditary kingdom. Now and then, appearing obliquely through the course of the ages, certain indications of kinship will appear, to remind us accidentally of a possible connection too subtle for our tracing. But every singer is a new miracle—created if nothing else is created—no growth developed out of precedent poets, but something sprung from an impulse which is not reducible to law—a being without father, without mother, like the mysterious patriot-king and priest upon the old Chaldean plains. How this is, is as difficult to find out as how human identity is, the most secret of all wonders. Science, so far as we are aware, has not even attempted to fathom this strangest of all the strange caprices in the universe;

but it is very curious, and very well worth the profoundest study.

The history of England from a literary point of view may be broadly divided into three great epochs, which are not so much the three centuries in which modern literature may almost be said to originate and run its course, as they are three eras which may be distinguished as the age of Elizabeth, the age of Anne, and, we should be glad to say for the sake of euphony and delightful equipoise, the age of Victoria; but, alas! though a number of the great names which made the last epoch illustrious lasted into her day, truth compels us to admit that the last flood-tide of intellectual wealth and genius came in the age of George, most unpoetical of patrons. If in this we seem to omit the great autocracy, or rather theocracy, administered by a severe and splendid deputy, of Milton, we do so with no want of veneration, but solely because his period was himself, and the gentle songsters around him, sweet as they were, had no title to the rank of princes, or sharers of his supremacy. But in the others we have named, genius is poured forth in a full and overflowing stream, and the leading spirit of the time is but the chief among equals. Nor does Dryden, his contemporary and successor, give sufficient wealth to the epoch to make it compete in greatness with the other groups. In the eighteenth century, however, a host of writers arose, following the same fashions and partaking the same influence, with a unity which links them together, as the writers of the Elizabethan age were linked. It will probably always remain a question for discussion what is the comparative importance of this period as coming between the others which have created English literature; but that it was an epoch of the most marked character there can never be any doubt. In its own opinion it was the climax, and sublimest development of

English genius. The prodigious wealth and freedom of the preceding age were, to its fastidious eyes, license and savagery. It was the age of taste, of critics, of style as an elaborate art, a thing cultivated for its own sake ; and as nothing worthy to be regarded had come before it, so it was hard to see what could come after it. Pope brought its poetical utterance to perfection ; and beyond perfection even the archangels cannot reach. After him were echoes and repetitions ; but the world was resigned to a kind of elegant certainty that all that could be aimed at was attained.

And, like the style, the subjects fit for poetry and imaginative writing of every kind were already tabulated and understood. The world, which had been so vast and broad, contracted into a narrow sphere where satire was the highest art and social manners the only subject. To correct society in its vices, and hold up the mirror to its foibles, was the great and only end of literature, "An unfortunate lady," the victim of some Lovelace, or an impersonation of avarice or envy, were the emblems of the passions. Such landscapes as existed were made up of velvet lawns and savage torrents, with Dryads and Naiads, and urns and fountains ; and when the chief poet of the age would charm the world with delicate fancy and heroic verse, the pleasant theft of a lady's curl was the subject of his muse. Thus everything was artificial in the sphere where once the loftiest imagination reigned. Titania's fairies, so well met by moonlight, the airy creatures of the woods and groves, turned into legions of sly little imps full of knowing adjustments, who kept safe the magic circle of Belinda's petticoat ; and hoops and patches took the place of hearts and thoughts. To be sure, there was a good deal of philosophy and instruction of various sorts conveyed in the medium of that melodious verse—sharp and distinct thinkings, character cut with a diamond.

classic eclogues, and fine sentiment. There was nothing wanting, in short, which the mind of that time could think of; and all enunciated with clear unhesitating voice in rhymes as correct as Boileau could have desired. It was not according to the genius of the English language; but it was as excellent a rendering of the rules of classic French into English, with a vigorous admixture of English force and robustness, into the foreign medium, as could have been desired. It was a fighting age, and never were the French more distinctively the national enemies of our island: but France was absolute in letters, if not on the field of battle, and from Twickenham to Grub Street everything owned her power.

This great literary epoch was, however, an anomaly. It was foreign from head to foot. Its laws and regulations were all those of another race. We are so much more liberal in our ideas than they were, that nobody attempts to ignore the just claim of the magnates of this period as they did those of their predecessors. However our affections may lie towards Pope, we do justice to his importance and his power; but his art was that of another atmosphere, and when he himself was wound up and accomplished like his verse, the state of affairs left behind was dismal and hopeless as it has rarely been before. Beyond him in his own method nothing more was possible. He had gone as far as man may go in the polish, the finish, the exact and faultless balance of poetical composition, and his art came to an end in him. The Augustan age was accomplished and over, and a dreary interregnum followed. During this interregnum a few fine but faint voices were heard by intervals, belonging neither to the age that was past nor to the new epoch which was still unrevealed. Goldsmith, with a fresh and genial note; Gray, delicate, melodious, and refined; Collins, too classic for the general—like stray birds waking in the night,



belated nightingales left solitary, their season over, or thrushes prematurely awakened by some too early gleam of the unaccomplished dawn. But in spite of those mild unintentional rebels, the tradition of the ended age bound England still with a bondage difficult to throw off. The poets were gone, but the critics were left; and those *précieuses*, who belong to a still lower depth, echoes and shadows of the critics, had formed themselves into little elegant coteries all over the country to hatch such stray germs of poetry as might be coming into being, and keep them correct, and frame them after the best models. If ever any freeborn thing stirred in the obscurity, they did their best to clip its wings.

Things were not much better in the other regions of literature. Johnson still reigned there an autocrat of the severest sway, imposing the clumsy grandeur of his own mode of expression upon the language, and overawing all beginners into imitation of those defects of his ponderous genius which they had no better gift to redeem. He had given much to his generation—a rugged uprightness and scorn for all meaner arts—a noble spirit which would not brook the servility to which literature had so long been bound; but in return he tyrannised over it, and permitted no voice to be heard in his presence, objecting in others to the independence which was his own great title to the respect and admiration of his time. He, too, had exhausted the soil that bore him, and brought its capabilities to an end; and literature, crushed under his weight, could only feebly moan out an allegiance to him, which in its heart it did not feel. The age was dying away ingloriously, failing in all those manifestations of the imagination which are the heart of literature. History, indeed, and philosophy still thrived and flourished; but the last had flitted northwards, and the first, when not in Edinburgh, was over the Channel,

hugging herself upon her quiet by the shore of Lake Lemán. Richardson, Fielding, and, at a distance, Smollett, had given vigorous life to the novel, a new form of literature in England; but that, too, had fallen silent, though the lively voice of Miss Burney awakened some of the old echoes. The world of English literature was frost-bound; it made small things into great. It had lost the true standard of English, and had learned to measure all merit by the stature of a few individuals, and constrain all voices into one monotonous and imitated tone.

Our present object is to trace the awakening of the new epoch in literature which dawned in the end of the eighteenth century, stretching forward into our own, and not only creating a new code and new laws, but changing the very atmosphere, the scene, the firmament, and bringing in a purer moral, and a higher soul. For this development of higher genius and purified life, the way was prepared by two poets, whom we may call the precursors of the new age. These heralds of the day arose spontaneously at very nearly the same moment to the sight of men, though one was already in the decline of life, and another in the perfect bloom of youthful manhood. From no quarter was it less likely that the new impulse should come than from the rural places in which William Cowper, an invalid and recluse, sick and sad, and sometimes more deeply disabled still, with a cloud of incipient insanity hovering over him, hid himself from the conflicts of the world: or where Robert Burns, a young and vigorous farm-labourer, went whistling after his plough along the Ayrshire furrows. He who took to the solace of verse in order to forget himself and his troubles, and he who "rhymed for fun" as he went about his daily work, were not the leaders any critic would have chosen for the revolution which was to change the

face of literature. But happily critics are not consulted on such matters. Spontaneously, to sweeten a life of suffering on one side and of toil on the other, thinking little of any result to follow, inspired by no rebellion or discontent with the mediums used before, and altogether without consent or knowledge of each other, these two strangely chosen reformers awoke to a sense of the power that was in them. To Burns it was a passion, but to Cowper not much more than a pastime. They awoke each in his covert, shadowed over with foliage and greenness, and—far apart from each other, in conditions of life as different as it is possible to conceive, stretched forth each his hand to the worthy work. A hypochondriac and a ploughman! The looker-on might well have laughed at the suggestion that imperial interests of any kind were to be affected by anything they could say or do; but yet between them they set the lamp alight which was to pass to so many gifted hands and lighten all the attentive skies. Fifteen years of the century were yet to run, when almost simultaneously these two poets—precursors of the greatest tide of genius that has flowed into our country since Shakspeare—began their public work; but we must step back into the shadows—into the actual meridian of the past age, to trace out to the reader what has already been so often done, the training and course of existence which prepared them for their mission.

## CHAPTER I.

WILLIAM COWPER.

WILLIAM COWPER was born in 1731 in the vicarage of Great Berkhamstead in Hertfordshire. At the time of his birth all the former generation of poets was still living and in full utterance. Pope, decrepit and waning, but not in power or in fame, was making his grotto and polishing his verses on his river-side, while Thames flowed sweetly by, but not to the accompaniment of any such song of love and beauty as that which Spenser sang. His *Essay on Man*, and several of his most important works, were being produced while the Hertfordshire parson's boy, a little weakly fellow,

“Delighted with his bauble coach, and wrapped  
In scarlet mantle warm, and velvet-capped,”

was drawn by the gardener Robin “to school along the public way;” Thomson, fat, amiable, and indolent, was manufacturing bad plays, and thinking lazily of the “pleasant land of drowsyhed,” which afterwards grew into the “Castle of Indolence;” Gray was scarcely out of those Eton fields to which he has given one of their tenderest recollections. In another region of literature, good Samuel Richardson was beginning to think of writing letters that should teach the common people, and especially “handsome girls obliged to go out to service;”

how to conduct themselves in the difficulties in their career, as well as how to frame epistles to their friends ; in the fulfilment of which modest design the honest bookseller stumbled somehow into Pamela, and, more wonderful still, into Clarissa, strange product of some occult inspiration, the child of dulness and unsuspected genius ; and in this undertaking roused and found out the keener metal of Fielding, who, fired by derision and indignant sense of superiority, placed his hardy tale by the side of the old proser's sentiment—but in so doing was betrayed, he too, by his good angel, into Parson Adams, though all he meant was Joseph Andrews to start with. The works of both come within the period of Cowper's youth. And Johnson, the autocrat of letters, was a poor usher in a school, as yet unwitting of the reign before him. Goldsmith was but just born in another parsonage, in Ireland, though his career was over some years before that of Cowper began in poetry. Such were the existing lights at the moment when this little timid child came into being. They were all congregated in the dingy old London of those days, as he grew towards manhood. And beyond that busy scene the larger world extended full of event and commotion. The reign was that of George II., or rather of Caroline, a nobler sovereign. Sir Robert Walpole was in the midst of his long and steady sway as Prime Minister, and Bolingbroke was assailing him with vigorous wit and logic. Handel was in Windsor, associating the English name with a new development of grave and noble music, a loan from Germany more harmonious than that of the royal family, still scarcely acclimatised among us ; and Garrick, still little known, was directing his thoughts to the elevation of the stage. Beyond the Channel there were plenty of notable figures revealed or on the point of revelation : Frederick the Great, awaiting the event which was to

bring about the seven years' war—the death of the emperor; Maria Theresa, that emperor's daughter, one of the greatest sovereigns of her race, and not likely to turn out so easy a victim as a young woman ought to have done; Louis XV. in France, lost in depravity and bankruptcy, fostering those seeds of the revolution which his father had sown. Fontenoy and Dettingen, and also—a miserable parallel to battles of which Englishmen are still proud—Culloden, were all fought when Cowper was a boy. • The young Chevalier, hapless adventurer, stormed through the one historical moment of his life, had his hour of triumph in faithful Scotland, and half seized England by surprise, during the same peaceful childhood. It was an exciting age, with news by every lumbering post and slow-paced waggon, such as set men's hearts beating; news that was sometimes of victory, yet sometimes also of trouble: the French interfering with our trade, the Spanish pirates maltreating our seamen on the high seas; our footing on the American continent, and faint beginning of our empire in India, kept in check by the nimble and adroit neighbour who was our national enemy: and England standing at bay, holding her own in all parts of her dominion, somewhat desperately abroad, and often with a panic at home, with melancholy prophets declaring loudly that her greatness was at an end, and her ruin near.

It is a very peaceful little vignette of life which rises before us against that stormy background, when we turn to Cowper's own tender recollections of his childhood, that picture made after fifty years, of the only home that had ever belonged to him, the "pastoral house" of which nobody now remembered that it had once been his. The memories of so young a child—for he was not six when his mother died, and its happiness was over—never perhaps were the foundation of so perfect a picture—the

child so truly infantile, the mother so vague and benign a vision, the pensive and shadowy sweetness of the recollection, carry it direct to the reader's heart.

“Thy maidens, grieved themselves at my concern  
Oft gave me promise of thy quick return,  
What ardently I wished, I long believed,  
And disappointed still, was still deceived ;  
By expectation every day beguiled,  
Dupe of to-morrow even from a child.  
Thus many a sad to-morrow came and went  
Till all my stock of infant sorrow spent,  
I learnt at last submission to my lot,  
And though I less deplored thee, ne’er forgot.”

Thus sorrow and disappointment ended the first brief chapter of his baby-life. He had not a happy youth, for he had no home, no natural shelter to return to in the little troubles of his school career; and no doubt this want gave double bitterness to the childish unhappiness which the gloom of his maturer days exaggerated in its turn. Unfortunately, the only record of his boyhood is the sombre account of it given by himself in after years, when the disposition to increase all the darker shades in his unregenerate days was strong upon him, as it was in most of those who thought as he did. From this account the credulous reader might be led to suppose that the poor little timid boy was depraved from his earliest years, and had been brought up by a succession of wicked people, all conspiring to heighten the natural blackness of his character, and put him beyond the reach of amendment. He grew wicked and wicked in his schoolboy days, he became an adept “in the infernal art of lying;” he had no sentiments of contrition, nor thoughts of God and eternity. About all this there seems a curious, but very evident self-delusion. Poet though he was, Cowper’s power of realising his own distant past seems to have failed him. He remembered the child in the gentle quiet

of the nursery, the mother's nightly visits and morning ministrations; but he forgot the boy who had played in the shadow of the Abbey, and rattled over the stony pavement in Dean's Yard; for there are other indications artlessly afforded by the very story itself, which prove that he was neither very sad nor very wicked. He played cricket and football, and excelled in these manly games; he formed a number of friendships which lasted into mature life; and to all appearance led his little existence in a harmless gentle way, liked by everybody, and with no tragical melancholy about him. Even the horror of public schools, which he expresses in his poems, is modified by unconscious admissions, "We love the play place of our infant days," he is betrayed into saying, even in the midst of his denunciations; and, beguiled from theory into recollection, lets his fancy stray to that charming picture of "the little ones unbuttoned, glowing hot" in full tide of those enjoyments which he too shared, before it occurred to him that he was depraved and miserable—

"The pleasing spectacle at once excites  
Such recollections of our own delights,  
That viewing it, we seem almost to attain  
Our innocent, sweet, simple years again."

Thus poetry rights the balance against the gloomy theory of life which swallowed up so much of Cowper's manhood; and he who has just maligned his childhood in prose inadvertently vindicates it in verse.

Of his youth we have the same dark description, with the same breaks and openings in it to show a different reality below. When he left Westminster School, he entered an attorney's office, where he was again miserable enough, to take his own jaundiced account of it; but when we correct this by the inadvertent admissions made at cheerful moments, the picture undergoes a pleasant change. The formal narrative continues to give us



gloomy glimpses of a weak and wretched youth, but the unintentional revelation is of a much more cheerful character. If he was idle and foolish, he was at the same time happy and gay, shirking his work perhaps, but for no more reprehensible indulgence than that of hanging about the pleasant house of his uncle, where there were girls and innocent diversion. "I did actually live three years with Mr. Chapman," he writes afterwards to Lady Hesketh, one of those girls, "that is to say, I slept three years in his house; but I lived, that is to say I spent my days, in Southampton Row, as you very well remember. There was I and the future Lord Chancellor constantly employed from morning to night in giggling, and making giggle, instead of following the law. Oh fie, cousin! how could you do so?" That Thurlow, the stern and saturnine, should have been his companion in happy levity, is as remarkable as that the laughing boy should afterwards have seen this careless episode under so gloomy a light. Thurlow's giggle is far more unaccountable than Cowper's, who kept the faculty of laughter all his life; and it is astonishing that the constant companionship of such a vigorous and dominant spirit should not have had more influence upon his gentle companion. But Cowper, being indisposed to effort by nature, was in circumstances which made his idleness as excusable as idleness can ever be. These were the days of sinecures and patronage. And he had influential connections, and in all probability felt his future to be assured. He was free to dally in the primrose paths, and happy in doing so. He helped to keep his uncle's house full of gentle mirth and frolic; and he fell in love, as was natural, with his uncle's daughter. When his apprenticeship to the attorney was over, and he began to live alone in chambers in the Temple, his biographers seem to agree that the coming cloud threw its first shadow

over him ; but then they are all painfully on the outlook for this coming cloud ; and it is hard to believe that a man could lead a very gloomy life who was a member of the "Nonsense Club, consisting of seven Westminster men, who dined together every Thursday," and who was distinguished by what was then called "restlessness," but which we should now call love of change and variety. His letters of this period represent him in anything but a dismal light. He tells us, indeed, that his life was "spent in an uninterrupted course of sinful indulgence," but that is a vague phrase which may mean anything, from actual vice to absence from church and dislike of early rising. He was, however—which is more fatal even than actual transgression—destitute of personal power and energy to an extraordinary extent, amiable and loving, but incapable of any sacrifice, honourable and honest, yet content to be dependent : a paradox not uncommon, but always involving misery. He loved, as such men love, his cousin Theodora ; but her father having objected to the marriage, the lover seems to have made no effort to render it possible. All that we know of her, which is little enough, denotes a high-spirited girl who would have been capable of bearing the burden of her companion's helplessness. But Cowper had not the courage or the earnestness to overcome his uncle's scruples. Ashley Cowper was not a stern or alarming parent. When he died, his nephew's hand records his character in terms of gentle enthusiasm—

●  
"Endowed with all that could engage  
All hearts to love thee both in youth and age ;  
In prime of life for sprightliness enrolled,  
Among the gay, yet virtuous as the old ;  
In life's last stage (oh, blessings rarely found !)  
Pleasant as youth with all its blossoms crowned ;  
Through every period of this changeful state,  
Unchanged thyself—wise, good, affectionate."

This was not a man to refuse to hear reason ; but it is evident all through his life that William Cowper was not capable of great and generous effort, even for one he loved. Throughout his life he accepts but never makes sacrifices. He is affectionate, sweet, and caressing, no one more pleasant to serve, more grateful, more tender. Whatever was done for him, he was most delightfully ready to acknowledge ; but all this is quite consistent with a kind of selfishness to which people generally shrink from giving its right name—a selfishness so refined and exquisite that the very sufferers by it often adore the amiable attractive weakness. No indication of any effort on his part to overcome the opposition of the family appears in the record—

“ Her, through tedious years of doubt and pain,  
Fixed in her choice, and faithful, but in vain ”—

he does indeed give one poetical tear to : but he does not seem to have paid Theodora even the compliment of faithfulness, since very soon after their separation he writes to a friend of a certain “ lovely and beloved little girl,” with whom he had spent a blessed three days, though he adds with the same resignation, that the approaching return of this “ bright star ” to the West Indies, in which region “ it had risen,” will leave him “ nothing but sighs and tears.” He was very willing to be loved and happy, but not to secure the possession even of happiness by the sacrifice of ease or leisure, or any personal comfort. He was, however, of the celibate class, which is as clearly indicated by nature as any other division of humanity, born to know no passion, but to be affectionately dependent upon the affection of women in all relations of life save one.

The “ seven Westminster men ” who formed the Nonsense Club brought Cowper at least within the circle

of the literary life of the period. Among them were Bonnel Thornton and George Colman the dramatist, who edited, or rather wrote between them, a paper called the *Connoisseur*, to which Cowper is believed to have contributed several short articles. He was thus attached to literature as most young men of literary tastes who have come with fair repute through their preliminary education are so likely to be, by a link of association at least and sympathy, and perhaps some mild pleasure in seeing themselves in print. He wrote verses too, as so many do, without special promise, or any indication that he was in the future to surpass, or even to attain to an equality with his two companions, who gave him the chance of helping them in their more ambitious efforts. The literary profession may be said to consist rather of men like these, who take up the art of writing as a trade, with considerable immediate fluency, but no particular inspiration, nor any faculty of continuance in them, than of the greater writers, who so often fall to their work by a different impulse altogether, often without any distinct intention in their minds, or consciousness of what is coming. Thornton and Colman were of the same class as that large and flourishing branch of the profession which is now occupied in journalistic work; but their productions were curiously different in form. The *Connoisseur* was one of the successors of the *Rambler*, and Johnson himself is said to have contributed to it; it was a little brochure filled with little essays upon general subjects, upon classical literature, and upon the manners and morals of the time. A big broadsheet such as occupies us now, full of news and political events, had then no existence: and this was the form of the periodical press in those days. It was the ebb of the wave which the *Spectator* had begun, and which Johnson had revived. Cowper contributed

playful little paper upon the art of keeping secrets, just as now-a-days he might have sent a disquisition on the Irish land laws or sanitary science. The two editors, however, produced it almost entirely by their own exertions. "We have not only joined in the work taken together, but almost every single paper is the joint product of both," they announced in their concluding number; and it is curious to see the inexperienced young Templar, who was their schoolfellow, but had none of their pretensions in literature, adventuring the pen which afterwards produced work so much more important than theirs in the little essays of this short-lived periodical, without any prevision in his mind or theirs of the very different level upon which he and they should stand hereafter.

Another pair of Cowper's literary schoolfellows were Lloyd and Churchill, persons much less safe and respectable than the others, but, like them, Westminster men. Long years after, when Cowper had gone to the other extreme of feeling, and might have been supposed to be entirely alienated from a man so profane both in literature and life, he still admired Churchill and his poetry with that loyal support of the school hero, which is one of the most tenacious and faithful of prejudices. Lloyd was the son of a Westminster master, under whom Cowper had worked as a boy, and for whom he in after years wrote a touching epitaph; and he too was the editor of a little weekly periodical, the *St. James's Magazine*, which he was apparently expected to compose entirely himself, with what little gratuitous assistance he could receive from his friends. He had taken refuge in letters (so called), in this curious journalism and trade of essay-writing, as his only means of escape from the life of a schoolmaster, which he found intolerable; but the magazine was apparently more doleful drudgery still. Cowper

was also a modest contributor to this periodical. He wrote in it a dissertation on the modern ode, signed with his initials; but he is not referred to in the list of names which are quoted in the preliminary poetical dialogue between the author and the bookseller, nor is there the slightest reason to believe that he was even thought of as likely to be of serious importance in any literary undertaking. The following scrap, out of a rhymed letter addressed by him to Lloyd, will show the modesty of his own ideas, and the unobtrusive position he was acknowledged to occupy beside his friend. It is interesting also as giving almost the earliest intimation of that despondency which later seized upon Cowper with such infernal force :—

“Tis not that I design to rob  
Thee of thy birthright, gentle Bob.  
For thou art born sole heir, and single,  
Of dear Mat Prior's easy jingle ;  
Not that I mean, while thus I knit  
My threadbare sentiments together,  
To show my genius or my wit,  
When God and you know, I have neither ;  
Or such, as might be better shown  
By letting poetry alone.  
'Tis not with either of these views,  
That I presumed t' address the Muse :  
But to divert a fierce banditti,  
(Sworn foes to everything that's witty !)  
That, with a black, infernal train,  
Make cruel inroads in my brain,  
And daily threaten to drive thence  
My little garrison of sense :  
The fierce banditti, which I mean,  
Are gloomy thoughts, led on by spleen.”

He was living alone in his chambers in the Temple when these lines were written, in cheerful intercourse with this set of clever, ingenious, and by no means strait-laced young men, all bound together by the most natural

of ties—cyeing their perturbations and excitement with the eye of an interested spectator, but by no means embarking in the same risky career, or venturing upon anything but the occasional little essay of an amateur, doing not much of anything indeed, apparently making no attempt to practise the profession to which he nominally belonged; for he had been called to the bar, little as that meant in those days. “My resolution is,” he says in one of his early letters to another of his youthful friends, “never to be melancholy while I have a hundred pounds in the world to keep up my spirits.” Apparently nothing could have been more reckless and imprudent than this happy-go-lucky existence, especially as he proposed to follow it as a matter of principle and philosophy. “This provokes me,” he writes, “that a covetous dog who will work by candlelight in a morning to get what he does not want shall be praised for his thriftiness, while a gentleman shall be abused for submitting to his wants rather than work like an ass to relieve them. Did you ever in your life know a man who was guided in the general course of his actions by anything but his natural temper?” Cowper was over thirty when he asked this pregnant question, so that it was no bravado of extreme youth. He was not rich enough to live such a life, and at that age it was a somewhat wretched way to be spending those precious sands of existence which run so quickly through careless fingers. So far as appears he had never made an honest effort of any kind in his life. His money was streaming thriftlessly away, and so were his best years; the schoolboy pranks of the Nonsense Club, the *pococurante* existence growing stale in its uselessness—and underneath all, it is scarcely possible to doubt, an under-current of that self-contempt which saps all energy, and engenders a listless hopelessness not energetic enough to be called despair,

but even more dismal—were all he had to represent life. It is scarcely possible to believe that such an existence could have gone on without some crisis to come.

Few events in history are better known than this crisis when it did come. The story has been told over and over again, and almost always, so attractive is the character of the man, with tenderness and sympathy. As a matter of fact, he who was to glorify and idealise the domestic routine of the most secluded life was up to this period of mature manhood living in a way as little praiseworthy or respectable as can be imagined, doing nothing, attempting nothing, and shutting his eyes to the future as far as was possible; but the principle of his existence afterwards was little changed, though the result was so different. The letter from which we have quoted is full of a subtle consciousness that his position is a false one. His self-excuses are self-accusations—"There is a degree of poverty which has no disgrace belonging to it," he says; "that degree, I mean, in which a man enjoys clean linen and good company; and if I never sink below this degree of it, I care not if I ever rise above it." But his "natural temper," that which he concludes with terrible justice to be the only rule by which a man is ever guided, was not more entirely the inspiration of his life in the Temple, than it was of the very different life at Olney, which he would have professed and believed to be governed by rules entirely opposite. He is quite consistent throughout. He would not if he could, and, as it turned out, he could not if he would, take his fate in his own hands. He could flow on with the stream that caught him, whatever it might be. His fits of insanity give a tragic piteousness to the story, and the extreme misery involved takes all power of judgment and wish to exercise it from the sympathetic spectator; but still the fact remains that Cowper had trained him-



self to incapacity, as other men do to work. He had let everything go from him ; nothing in the world, not love itself, not independence, far less ambition, were worth to him the effort of seizing them. In all probability his appointment, if it had come to him at twenty-two instead of thirty-two, would have found him by no means so tragically helpless ; but this is a useless conjecture. " Many years ago, cousin," he writes, while the crisis was impending, to Lady Hesketh, " there was a possibility I might prove a very different thing from what I am at present. My character is now fixed and riveted fast upon me." Nothing could be more sad or more true.

The event which brought this aimless existence to a climax was one to which all Cowper's training, such as it was, had tended—the piece of looked-for good fortune which had been the only justification of his previous indolence. All this time a lucrative and important office had been destined for him, and the time had now come when he could enter upon it. The place of Clerk to the Journals in the House of Lords, which was in the gift of his relation, Major Cowper, fell vacant by the death of the previous occupant, while at the same time two other offices of greater value, and held conjointly, were resigned by their holder. Major Cowper, by one of those inexplicable arrangements common at that period, was " the patentee of these appointments," and he at once, as no doubt was fully expected of him, offered the best paid and most important of them to his kinsman. " Dazzled by so splendid a proposal, and not immediately reflecting upon my incapacity to execute a business of so public a nature, I at once accepted it," he says ; but the very next moment " seemed to receive a dagger in my heart." It was the lesser appointment, that of Clerk to the Journals, which he had hoped for, chiefly, as it would seem, because " the business of the place was transacted

in private ;" and as he had been, or fancied himself to have been, so wicked as to "express an earnest wish" for the death of the official then holding it, it was perfectly natural to him afterwards to believe that "the spirit of a murderer" was in his heart, and that all the misery that followed was sent to him as "an immediate punishment of my crime." After a week of dismal ponderings over the great prospect before him, Cowper at last entreated his kinsman to give the better appointment to another friend, and allow him to drop into the safer obscurity of the place he had originally desired. This expedient laid both Major Cowper and his nominee open to the imputation of a job, "since nothing would be so likely to bring a suspicion of bargain and sale upon his nomination, which the Lords would not have endured, as his appointment of so near a relative to the least profitable office, while the most valuable was allotted to a stranger." The risk, however, had to be run; and a "momentary calm" took possession of Cowper's mind when he saw this safe and quiet position behind backs opening to him. But whether "the Lords" suspected, as was supposed likely, a disgraceful transaction behind (*bien entendu*, it was neither disgraceful nor undesirable that the "patentee" should use his power for the advantage of one of his own blood, natural affection in this important particular being fully recognised as the rule of the public service), it is certain that an opposition arose, and Cowper "was bid to expect an examination at the bar of the House, touching my sufficiency for the post I had taken." This unforeseen and unprecedented ordeal drove him frantic. Nobody, so far as we are aware, has instanced the proposal as a proof either of the advantages or disadvantages of the principle of examination, which is now the key to every door—yet it affords a curious commentary upon the uses of that method. It drove Cowper

into insanity ; but perhaps even in this elementary and arbitrary stage of its existence it was beneficial in its way. Had he stolen in quietly to his place, and reaped its placid advantages without any such alarming preliminary, he might perhaps never have been insane, never have gone to Olney, never written poetry to console a spirit, which in that case might neither have been sick nor sorry. There is no end to conjecture, and everything, as the poet himself would have been the first to allow, works for good. The world pays cheaply for a great work and influence when the sufferings of one forlorn individual are all the price that is demanded. It was hard upon the poet, but good for the race. The "Task" was of far more importance to the general welfare than the happiness of one young man about town ; and his happiness was not of a very warm or genuine description that its temporary extinction should have called forth so many moans.

Thus the unfortunate young man was out of the pleasant indolence and carelessness of his unthrifty life, plunged all unprepared and incapable into that maelstrom which now, under the easy title of "going in for an examination," is so universally known to the youth of our time. In those days slang was not, at least in this kind ; and that fact of itself made everything more serious. No pleasing levity, no light-hearted calculations of chance, modified the terrible ordeal. "A thunderbolt would have been as welcome to me as this intelligence," he says. "I knew to demonstration that upon these terms the clerkship of the journals was no place for me. To require my attendance at the bar of the House, that I might there publicly qualify myself for the office, was in fact to exclude me from it. In the meantime, the interest of my friend, the honour of his choice, my own reputation and circumstances, all urged me forward—all pressed me

to undertake that which I saw to be impracticable. They whose spirits are formed like mine, to whom a public exhibition of themselves on any occasion is mortal poison, may have some idea of the horrors of my situation : others can have none."

In this state of mind he began to study the work that would be required of him, going daily to the office, trying to extort information from the books, without help, without capacity or habit of investigation—and exposed, as he thought rightly or wrongly, to the hostility of all the inferior clerks and everybody around. The state of mind into which he gradually worked himself can, as he says, only be divined by those to whom the same conditions of mental enervation, feebleness, self-indulgence, and excited imagination are possible. The robust mind, or even that which, weak in itself, is braced by habits of self-subordination, would, but for the pity of it, be disposed to turn with a certain contempt from the pitiable sight. But the issue gives to this hopeless struggle the solemnity of a tragedy ; and it is impossible to read Cowper's account of his growing madness, the gradual subjection of all his powers to the one fixed horror, from which he could not escape, the gloomy door of suicide that seemed to open and shut, as by a fitful wind, in front of him ; his attempts, always feeble, and restrained by the very weakness that moved him to it, to push that door wide, and make his frightened exit thereby—without feeling the strange fascination of the struggle. A hunted soul in restless conflict with its own delusions, sometimes flying before the dark crowd of excited fancies which might be spirits of darkness for anything he could tell or see, sometimes standing miserably at bay ; the world shut out from that strange solitude in which he moved alone, turning every incident vaguely perceived through the mist, every encounter of men's faces and

voices, into agents in the chase to which he was subject, driving him nearer and nearer to the precipice—this strange and wild picture forms the greatest contrast to the tranquil pictures he was to leave to us as his contribution to the wealth of England ; but it has in it a force of passionate feeling which they do not possess, and which will always make it painfully interesting to the student of humanity and life. 12085 .

And nothing can be more strange than to realise the background of busy and cheerful and trivial existence upon which this agony stands out. The Nonsense Club continued its existence as long at least as Cowper kept above water, and its pranks were sometimes amusing enough. Among them was an exhibition of signboards, got up by Thornton in ridicule of the annual exhibitions of pictures which preceded the establishment of the Royal Academy and its yearly show. It may be easily imagined how the names of taverns would lend themselves to this facile joke, and all the fun that might be got out of it—fun of a poor order, but yet suiting the broad and easy fancy of the time, and in which Hogarth, the master of a mode of expression more terrible and withering than this,, took a part. And the little company of wits who were Cowper's chief companions were writing their little essays and composing their verses, and as busy about their magazines as if the existence of the world depended upon the getting up of so many monthly pages, while he was going through all this delirious struggle. No doubt these young adventurers thought him better off than any of them, and envied his fate, with his competence to step into, and his powerful friends behind him. One of them came to see him at the very blackest of the struggle, to congratulate him—just after in the revulsion of his distracted heart he had flung the laudanum out of the window. " We conversed awhile with a real cheerfulness on his

part, and an affected one on mine ; and when he left me I said in my heart, I shall see him no more." The other Westminster lads who had been at school with him, had, to all appearance, a great deal more cause for uneasiness than Cowper : Lloyd breaking down under his work—Churchill writing violent and powerful verse, in bad odour with the authorities, and wretched in remorseful vice at home—were both drawing near the end of their tragedy, and were in every external respect far more to be pitied than their old schoolfellow. They died about a year after, the one of a broken heart for the loss of the other, having wasted their faculties, and stained their names in the brief career through which they had stormed so wildly. Churchill was exactly Cowper's age, his friend a little younger. And thus they dropped before either was half-way over the path of life. On the other hand Colman had turned his efforts to the stage, and had become a successful writer of plays, a friend of Garrick. At the same time, though altogether outside of this little society, Goldsmith was going through his serio-comic troubles, impounded by his landlady, liberated by Johnson, writing some of the most immortal works of the age, but smiled if not laughed at by all the contemporaries who were so much wiser than the reckless Irishman, who "wrote like an angel, and talked like poor Poll." It is curious that the two circles should have flourished so near to each other without touching, and that no echo of Johnson's heavy foot and autocratic speech should have sounded into the precincts in which Cowper was inclosed. Yet from Fleet Street to the Temple was not far, and no doubt the sweet-tempered and courteous young idler from that hive of gaiety and folly, wit and wisdom, must have stood aside upon the busy pavement many a time, while the big frame of "the great lexicographer" lumbered along, scarcely guided by his dim eyes. But they might

have been in different worlds for all we hear mutually of their existence—Cowper, always the very embodiment of gentle manners and suave consideration, was very probably repelled by Johnson's rude superiority—and Goldsmith's vanity and swagger would be still less to the taste of the well-born and fastidious gentleman. They would seem never to have crossed each other—a thing which gives us a strange perception of the coteries into which London was divided.

It was on the very morning of the day on which he was to make his appearance at the bar of the House of Lords for the dreaded examination, that Cowper made his last and most strenuous effort at suicide. The previous ones had been but intentions, but this was carried the length of action, and when it failed by the breaking of the cord with which he had hanged himself, the unfortunate young man, on recovering consciousness, sent with the courage of desperation for his kinsman and patron. Major Cowper seems to have been as prompt as his young relation was weak. He asked at once for the papers of nomination, and carried them off with him on the spot. And so the dreaded ordeal was averted, but not the consequences of all this excitement and misery. The one immediate cause of anguish being removed, Cowper's mind, now thoroughly astray, and excited into a habit of self-torture, sought about it for another. It was only then that his sufferings took the turn of religion. The magnitude of the sin he had been about to commit suddenly became evident to him, and the misery of earthly panic turned into an agony of remorse. He had "felt no concern of a spiritual kind up to this time"—but now the sense of the crime he had almost committed seized upon him like a lion. In every book he opened—not the Bible only, but every printed page, even those of the old dramatists—he found some winged words which trans-

fixed him. Never man had been so guilty—never man had sinned so terribly. God was against him and all good angels, as well as men. He had committed the unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost. Life was better than death, only because it delayed a little the burning fire of eternal punishment. This gradually heightening horror, coming not from without but within, rolling upwards in heavy vapours that hid both sky and sun, out of his perturbed and anguished being, came at last the length of unmistakable madness. While he was still capable of some effort of mind he sent for a friend and family connection, Martin Madan, who was one of the new sect of Evangelicals, roused by Wesley and his associates to make a new and much-needed revolution in the religious life of the country, and got some temporary consolation from him; but the evil by this time had gone too far to be cured. A copy of *Sapphires*, to which he gave vent at this terrible moment, places before us in tuneless tumultuous lines the horror that possessed his soul. Not poetry but misery produced them; he had not as yet found out the way to speak in his own voice and manner. A forlorn echo of his studies, the artificial utterance of the schools had to suffice him in his wretchedness.

“Hatred and vengeance,—my eternal portion  
Scarce can endure delay of execution,  
Wait with impatient readiness to seize my  
Soul in a moment.

“Dannèd below Judas; more abhorred than he was  
Who for a few pence sold his holy Master!  
’Twice betrayed, Jesus, me, the last delinquent  
Deems the profanest.

“Man disavows and Deity disowns me,  
Hell might afford my miseries a shelter;  
Therefore, Hell keeps her ever-hungry mouths all  
Bolted against me.”



"It will be proper," he says, "to draw a veil over the secrets of my prison-house." It would be a curious question, could we in pity for the woeful spectacle thus set before us, have the heart to investigate it, how much the habit of continual self-reference and unconscious egotism have to do with this peculiar form of mental disease. Individual character is far more involved in intellectual aberration than most people are disposed to admit, and it is our conviction that self-will and self-love will almost invariably be found at the bottom of such failures of the brain. A man of generous temper and large heart—one habitually more occupied with the happiness and comfort of others than with his own, has an armour of proof against this mysterious and terrible disease. But Cowper had laid himself open to its attacks; he had lived the life of a careless egotist for years. He had let everything go from him rather than make the necessary effort to secure anything; and, accordingly, he was quite defenceless when the strain came.

And it was all the more miserable that his malady should have taken a religious form, from the fact that the newly awakened religious feeling of the age was almost entirely introspective. Wesley had awakened his countrymen to a consciousness that this world was not everything—that the unseen and eternal were not only of some importance, but of supreme importance, far exceeding the seen and temporal; but he had not stopped there. He had turned the current of religious feeling, both within and without his own community, into the channel of severe and constant self-examination. He had taught his disciples—and almost every pious person of the time was more or less his disciple—to weigh every feeling and impulse which arose in their minds, and to allow no movement of the affections or fancy to escape their scrutiny. They were intent (in theory) upon them-

selves as a surgeon is on the subject he is dissecting. The simile is unsavoury, but we know no other so exact. Such a theory is by nature injurious only to the few individuals who are predisposed to enter into its full meaning. Most men have too many clogs of flesh and blood about them, too many sympathies and emotions, too much instinctive and unreasoning confidence in the God that made them, to be driven frantic by it; and accordingly, the good it does to the mass, by teaching them the profound importance of right feelings, motives, and wishes, and by putting spiritual religion in its true place, as something above and beyond mere external observances, is probably tenfold more than the harm it has done in creating the sin of spiritual selfishness. But Cowper had not the safeguards that protect the mass of humanity. This form of religion tended to increase by every means, and as it were to legitimatise and give a heavenly sanction to those habits of mind from which his madness came. To cure him of that tragic self-importance which made him perceive in himself a kind of antagonist to God, pursued implacably by divine wrath and contended for by all the powers of darkness—an enemy so important that heaven departed from its usual rules and made war against him *à outrance*—the religion of his day set him to self-examination. It taught him to regard God as perpetually watchful of his smallest movements, noting everything with a vigilant eye, more easily angered than a jealous woman, insisting on a share in every thought. Instead of the “larger, other eyes than ours,” with which the gentler philosophy of to-day endows even the departed spirits of human race, the sign of God’s greatness to Wesley and to Newton was the minuteness of His all-inspection, the ceaseless, breathless watch He kept upon every word and every thought. And when it is fully realised what this means; when the reader represents to

himself the effect upon a sensitive mind of such a constant unremitting surveillance; when he thinks of the poor solitary half-insane human creature feeling himself surrounded by the austere, all-penetrating light of eyes that watch him waking and sleeping, watch him in his weakness, in his dreams, at the table, among his books, whatever he does or thinks or says, taking account of everything and laying up an awful score of unconsidered sins against the judgment day,—can he wonder that Cowper's madness came back again and again, and was the persistent shadow of his life? This was how the most pious men of his time regarded God. It is how human nature, at all times, is most apt to regard Him, being so seldom able to divest itself of a deep consciousness of guilt towards Him. These men spoke much of the Saviour and spiritual joy; but it did not occur to them that God's loving and large comprehension of our confused ways and works must be not less but infinitely more indulgent and tender than that of any man. Yet this was the theory of existence which such a mind as Cowper's wanted, and in which was its only hope.

He was placed under the charge of Dr. Cotton in St. Alban's, an excellent physician, a good man, and, according to the fashion of his time, a creditable poet, who sympathised as deeply with his religious anxieties as a perfectly sane man could do, and did what he could to help the anguished spirit not only by medical care and treatment, but by spiritual counsel. It is impossible for us to discriminate in such a case the delicate line which separates disease of the body from trouble of the soul, but at the same time it is very difficult (though it happens to be the fashion of the present moment) to obliterate that line altogether, and accept Cowper's malady as purely physical. To say of his recovery what his latest biographer, Mr. Goldwin Smith, says, in an essay which is

discriminative and just on most points—that Cowper's recovery “was brought about, as we can plainly see, by medical treatment wisely applied; but it came in the form of a burst of religious faith and hope,”—seems to us somewhat absurd, and not a little unscientific, though supposed to be in accordance with the latest scientific tenets. At the best it is but a conjecture that religious faith and hope can be produced by a regulation of the digestive organs. Few people manage to buy happiness even in smaller matters by such inexpensive means. However, by whatsoever means attained—in all probability by many means acting together—by calm, and the absence of causes of external irritation; by the wearing out of the paroxysm of insane delusion, by the soothing influence of religious intercourse: and, finally, by that inexplicable power which nobody may understand, but which it is impossible to ignore—called grace, conversion, light from heaven, by the associates whom Cowper now chiefly prized, and only very lamely and vaguely accounted for by the philosophers as a reformed digestion—the sick man got well. He did more than get well; a tremulous and exquisite happiness took the place of his anguish and despair. We may safely say that if any physician could promise to his patients by any kind of physical treatment, such a result of blessedness as that attained by this weak and troubled spirit, no sanitary establishment in the world would be so crowded, no ministrant to the mind diseased so richly and amply rewarded as that physician would be.

Had his history ended here, it would scarcely have been more remarkable than that of a host of converts whose transition from a profane and secular to a religious life, has been marked by not unsimilar agonies. But Cowper was not altogether delivered, and his career had still many dark vicissitudes. He was “converted” and

happy, but he had still the same indolent and unoccupied being, the same limited sphere of gentle self-absorption, as before; and never escaped out of that narrow circle into the wider influences even of a family, where egotism has at least the excuse of being doubled or quadrupled, and where self must give way to other selves, if not to any broad rule of generous self-abandonment. He was two years at St. Alban's under the charge of Dr. Cotton; and when he leaves that scene of his sufferings and recovery there is a touching air of subdued tranquillity and convalescence about him, which forms a tender background to the ecstasies which have now taken the place of his former fits of intolerable anguish. He came to Huntingdon in the year 1765. No particular reason seems to have influenced his brother in making choice of this place of residence for him, except that it was near—and happily not too near—to Cambridge, where John Cowper, the only surviving member of the family, a Fellow of his college, usually resided. He was a kind brother, but probably he was not prepared to take upon him the entire charge of such an invalid, or to wear out his own spirit with the constant sight of one who had become an embarrassment to all his friends. Huntingdon was near enough to permit frequent visits—the brothers saw each other every week, we are told—but it was not too near. There was not at this time any sympathy between them on the religious topics of which William Cowper's mind was now full. His brother contemplated his new rapture, as he had contemplated his former sufferings, with the uneasiness of a spectator who was by no means sure that there was not something more important than all else in heaven and earth, in those convulsions of the spirit—which, nevertheless, were madness to his common sense, and offensive to the beliefs he had held during all his life. Four years later, John Cowper was himself converted, and died

with something of the same rapture of religious certainty which now and then glorified his brother's life.

This choice, however, so inadvertent as it seems to have been, of Huntingdon as the future home of the convalescent, led to remarkable results. Here Cowper dropped apparently by hazard into the strange little dull town (yet not so dull either; but possessed of diversions such as put the economy of little towns in our own day to shame), without introductions, without an acquaintance, found what he might have sought over a whole world without finding, had he sought it consciously—the one friend in the world from whom he was never to be separated more. It seems a strange kind of discipline for an invalid, to set him down thus in an obscure corner, without occupation, or amusement, or companions; but in all likelihood his friends were at their wits' end what to do with him, and glad to have him peaceably put out of sight anywhere, as the kindest friends are apt to do with an amiable but impracticable dependant of this class. Cowper had been proved incapable of taking care of himself, or enduring the ordinary struggles of life; he had not nearly enough to live on, yet he was expensive and generous in a way which no man without money has a right to be. He had a man-servant in attendance upon him, and he had also taken up and was providing for a boy who had interested him. Most likely all the Cowpers, though very kind and faithful to him, were thankful that he should be safely withdrawn out of the way. And his friends in London seem either to have dropped from him, or been dropped by him, in the time of his illness. The only one with whom he continued to correspond was Joseph Hill, one of the least-known members of the Nonsense Club, an undistinguished, good man, who had taken charge of his friend's affairs and stood by him all his life. Nonsense Clubs and all such follies were far

from Cowper's thoughts now. His cousin, Lady Hesketh, the sister of Theodora, who had always been his faithful friend, resumed correspondence with him when he re-emerged out of the cloud. But except these two and his brother, he brought no old alliances with him out of his former life. He was the more ready for the new tie which awaited him here.

A great deal has been said about the poet's connection with Mrs. Unwin, and perhaps the greater proportion of the public from his day to this have entertained the idea that the love between them was more or less the love of lovers, and that it might (and in the opinion of many ought to) have led to marriage. Except one statement brought forward by Mr. Benham in the biography prefixed to the Globe edition of Cowper's works—a statement of something which Mr. Bull remembered to have “heard his father say,” backed by an extract from an unpublished diary of Newton's—there seems no evidence, except that he was a man and she a woman, for this idea. The relations between them were evidently as calm, as sober, and as simply affectionate as if their bond had been one not of choice but of nature. And in all the revelations of himself and his ways which he poured forth during their long companionship—revelations in which the most sacred things of life are conjoined with the most trivial—there is not one word which could lend the most far-away support to this notion. Not the least shade of shyness or self-consciousness is upon either of the friends: their connection was so simply a matter of fact, so clearly recognised by all who belonged to them on both sides, exciting no jealousy or alarm on either, that nothing but the popular prejudice against the possibility of such friendship could, in our opinion, have suggested the thought. It is the most perfect example on record of a relationship so difficult, yet so beautiful; and perhaps

only under circumstances so peculiar—circumstances in which the man owed everything to the woman, and never was otherwise than dependent upon her support and affection—could it be possible to maintain it. The vulgar mind rejects it altogether, and the experienced though not vulgar, doubt; but it begins to be more possible in the present day, when our Protestant deification of marriage has ceased to be polemical, to realise the existence of a class which is celibate by nature, and neither wishes nor requires, to marry—a class to which, we are convinced, Cowper belonged. The reader, perhaps, will always decide the question according to his own bias, but we by no means agree that it is settled by the piece of evidence above quoted. Here is a man most voluminous in letter-writing, who has babbled (charmingly, delightfully, in a way few men can do—yet the word is not unjust) about everything that happened to him, great and small. Yet we have to wait a century, until somebody chooses to print an extract from a friend's diary, for information of what might have been the most important step in his life. However, we do not suppose that argument is likely to affect the question one way or another.

When Cowper first made acquaintance with the Unwins, Mr. Unwin was still alive, and the family consisted of four persons, son and daughter, as well as the father and mother. His first friend was the son; but it was the mother always whose society attracted him the most. "She and I walked together near two hours in the garden, and had a conversation which did me more good than I should have received from an audience of the first prince in Europe. That woman is a blessing to me, and I never see her without being the better for her company," he says. He was thus brought within reach of an influence which was more suited to his wants than any other. He who at fifty could say that his mother,



whom he lost at six, had never been out of his thoughts for a week together, thus recovered in a moment the maternal aid of which his enfeebled life stood in need. It is ridiculous to speak of the relationship of mother and son, between a man of thirty-six and a woman of forty-three; but so are many other things ridiculous, which at the same time are the source of great individual happiness. There are cases in which a very young woman is capable of occupying the position of a mother to brothers and sisters who may even be older than herself. Mrs. Unwin took this feeble soul in hand, not in the right of superior strength, but of benignity and kindness, understanding all that he most wanted. He had no woman belonging to him, no one to whom he could give the thousand confidences which, kept within himself, wounded and overwhelmed him—and to whom he could look for that sympathy, which penetrated to every act of his life and every crevice of his thoughts. She did not ask more than he could give in return. His shy bachelorhood was never invaded. Till their last breath he was Mr. Cowper to the serene matron, who was his Mary, the object of a perpetual claim and demand on his part, the claim of weakness and dependence. But one great charm of the relationship to such a man no doubt lay in the fact that there was no balancing claim upon her side. She wanted nothing from him but the tranquil companionship which was his happiness.

When her husband died the two were left alone together, the son going out into life into a sphere of his own, the daughter marrying, and following her husband and separate fortunes. The widow and her harmless lodger chose Olney as their place of refuge, not from any attraction in the dull and unlovely village, but for the sake of John Newton, the curate of the place—a man who belongs to the history of literature in one of its

lesser walks, but whose strong and notable individuality has more to do with the religious excitement of the time than with any other of its developments. He was the true type of a converted sinner turned into a saint; a man of strong character and ceaseless activity, whose early life had gone through all manner of violent changes. His stormy youth had veered from the pious exercises taught him by his mother, to the rude infidelity which was the first reaction from it. He had gone to sea at eleven, in the collier smack of which his father was the skipper; had been impressed under the horrible system then existing, and after various experiences in the pandemonium of a man-o'-war, had entered the slave service; and without any special perception of the evils of that abominable trade, had serenely commanded a slaver for several voyages before illness and some dislike of his profession induced him to return home. Nothing would serve this energetic person then—having already gone through all the preliminaries of conversion, and being as determined, as vehement, and as powerful in this new development as he had been in the old—but to enter the Church of England, and take part in the Evangelical crusade then organising everywhere, and universally opposed by all that thought itself cultivated or learned in society. When he at last attained his desire he became curate of the little Buckinghamshire town, where, among the lace-workers and straw-plaiters there was much work to be done, and much reformation needed. Newton wrote some spiritual treatises, and had a principal part in the collection of Olney hymns, familiar to the Evangelical party, and the Dissenters who fraternised with it for many years. His acquaintance with Cowper and Mrs. Unwin was of recent date. He had gone to see them at a moment when their hearts were very open to sympathy, immediately after Mr. Unwin's death; and

probably out of pity for their forlorn condition, and with an impetuous adoption of them as fellow-saints and congenial spirits, had immediately proposed to take a house for them at Olney, where they could have the consolation of his own spiritual counsel and direction. The attraction must have been great on both sides, for an extreme intimacy, as of members of one family, arose at once between them.

They settled accordingly at Olney. The life the family had lived at Huntingdon had been almost monastic in its routine. Two hours of religious reading or converse in the morning, then morning prayer in church, then religious conversation in the evening, and a concert of hymns to wind up with, had been their regular daily round—a routine which discloses as much absolute leisure and power to do as they pleased, as devotional feeling. But in Olney the time spent in devotion was greatly increased. Instead of the morning service came infinite preaching, prayer meetings in which Cowper himself, notwithstanding his natural timidity and horror of all public appearances, was constantly called upon to officiate, and visiting of the sick and poor. Newton thus inspired his new parishioner to undertake duties more difficult and alarming than those which he had been unable to face, and for fear of which he had all but destroyed himself in London; and it would be difficult to imagine anything more absorbing than such a routine. An infinity of small duties and observances are, next to hard work, the most complete of common expedients for satisfying the restless. Cowper became wholly absorbed in this ceaseless round. Nothing was talked of, nothing thought of, but saving souls and urging the careless over the threshold of conversion. For such an object, what pains could be too much? Cowper was made solemnly happy by the conversion of his brother, though grieved by that

brother's death ; but what, indeed, could have happened better to him or to any man than to be snatched into heaven, in all the freshness and bloom of feeling, at the moment almost when his darkness was turned into light ! Newton furnished the energy, the movement, the power, which was necessary to keep the whole in motion. There was a door made in the wall which separated Cowper's house from that of his friend. Into that life of narrow yet lofty aspiration, where perpetual meditation, prayer, and the pernicious researches of self-examination, were enlivened only by those little bits of village gossip which now represented all the outside world to the cultivated mind and tender sportive fancy of a man once used to surroundings so different—Cowper was more and more closely shut up. He became a kind of curate to his energetic companion, who probably had not the slightest idea of the risk the gentler soul beside him was running. The pot of iron and the pot of porcelain thus swayed along together upon the quickening stream till finally the crash came.

It was in 1771, ten years after his first attack, that the second overwhelmed him. Up to this time his estrangement from all interests but those of the parish and religious life had gradually grown and increased. He who had taken so warm an interest in all passing events, that he "leaped for joy" at the news of "Boscawen's success," and whose "rapture nothing could express when Wolfe made the conquest of Quebec," says coldly now—"Whether the nation is worshipping Mr. Wilkes or any other idol is of little moment to one who hopes and believes he shall shortly stand in the presence of the great and blessed God ;" he whose power of letter-writing has by many critics been considered almost as remarkable as his poetry, sends a brief spare note, half-a-dozen lines and no more, with long intervals between, to

the one only friend, Joseph Hill, who still insisted upon writing to him. He read little, having no books, nor any time to give to them. Now and then he wrote a few hymns for Newton's collection, and obeyed Newton's will, and followed Newton's ways, with a miserable docility. The lurking demon which pursued him was not long in taking advantage of circumstances so congenial. Cowper was in the vicarage when the final outburst came, and such was the obstinacy of the attack, that months elapsed before he could be got to return to his house, though it was only next door—an extraordinary trial of his friend's affection. We have no particular account of the events of this terrible time. Newton was overwhelmed with sorrow and sympathy—a sympathy which was naturally soon tinged by a sense of the extraordinary burden thus cast upon him. Mrs. Unwin alone stood by the man who had thrown himself like a child upon her companionship; uttering no word out of the terrible vigil, making no attempt to deliver herself; wearing her life out in attendance upon him, in humouring all his sick fancies, and watching all his troubled ways.

Cowper recovered from this second attack as a child might have recovered from a severe illness, with no rapture of light and joy such as attended his former recovery, but a gentle and languid return to the possibility of existence. He came slowly to life out of doors. The spiritual and intellectual man which had been strained to death dropped from him, and a harmless gentle creature, with the tastes of a child, came out into the silent sunshine instead. He pruned the trees, he fed the fowls, smiling, "for the first time for sixteen months," at some touch of nature among them. When he at last consented to go home, the flickering life grew a little stronger; he became a carpenter, made bird-cages and tables, and built himself a greenhouse, like a boy come

home for the holidays. "As long as he is occupied," says Newton, "he is tolerably easy." As the process advanced he tried a little drawing, and, when he began to approach complete amendment, books. But he was not fully restored (if, indeed, he can ever have been said to be fully restored) until his spiritual director was removed from Olney. It seems almost cruel to the real friendship and affection subsisting between them, to note the new spring which came to Cowper as soon as he was left to himself. Probably he was quite unconscious of it, and the friendship remained as warm as ever; but the fact is certain that Newton was no sooner out of the way than the first break appeared in the sky of the poet. Newton left Olney in the end of 1779, and in May 1780 Cowper sent to his friend Hill, with whom he had resumed correspondence, a copy of the pleasant verses entitled "Report of an Adjudged Case not to be found in any of the Books;" the case of "*Nose versus Eyes*." The coincidence is singular, if it is no more; and it is singular, too, to note the innocent unconscious hypocrisy with which he keeps up to Newton the semblance of entire darkness after the invasion of this spark of light. The interposition of "a sportive thought" is, he says, "as if harlequin should intrude himself into the ghastly chamber where a corpse is deposited in state"—a saying which his biographers in general take for a proof of the continuance of his darker mood, but which looks much more like that maintenance of the habitual gloom expected from a sufferer, which is one of the commonest and most excusable traits of humanity. "You think I am merry, and have got over it," we all say when we are surprised by our first laugh; "but if you only knew how my outward appearance mocks the woe within." Thus Cowper kept on his sables, his melancholy countenance, knowing that these glooms would gain him a certain

credit in his friends' eyes which a laugh would dissipate; but, all the same, felt the warm tide of renewed life stealing into his heart.

And now there dawned upon him brighter days—the brightest days in his life. He begins not only to write to his friends, but to send verses to them; now sportive, now moralising, but all disclosing a new tide in his mind. His letters to Newton still display, with a certain half-sad, half-amusing persistency, the black mask of woe unutterable in which that friend had been accustomed to see him; but he puts it on to no other of his correspondents. Thus, while he writes to Unwin of his favourite pursuits, it is in cheerfulest tones. "I never received a little pleasure in my life; if I am delighted, it is in the extreme;" but he recurs to the fictitious solemnity habitual to their intercourse when he tells Newton of the very same pleasures, assuring him that when he has paid his greenhouse, his latest toy, "the accustomed visit, and watered it and given it air, I say to myself—'This is not mine, it is a plaything lent me for the present; I must leave it soon.'" The solemnity here is almost ludicrous; he could not have spoken more seriously had "the plaything lent him" been a favourite child. But it becomes amusing to note this entire change of tone according to the correspondent. It is as if Newton and Cowper were compelled to use a different language from that of ordinary men, and kept up their proficiency in it, as they might have done with a foreign tongue, by practising it between themselves. But in the meantime his bondage to unnatural duties was over, and all about him learned to humour and soothe, no longer to make claims upon, the gentle invalid. How to keep him amused and quietly employed was now the chief problem, not how to make use of him, and turn his gifts and graces to account.

This then was the training which made a poet of Cowper, one of the most popular in England—in his way a transforming influence, a new beginning of intellectual life and power. Had we been left to conjecture what lines of education would have been the best on which to raise up for us the precursor of a new poetical age, certainly these are not the lines which we would have chosen. Nor, had we been asked to prophesy what were the works to be expected from a man so exceptionally circumstanced—with a past so strangely chequered, a future so painfully uncertain, a mind so sensitive, and which had passed through so many passionate struggles—could we have hit upon anything half so unlikely as the actual issue. What we should have looked for would have been some profound and morbid study of a despairing soul, some terrible pictures like those of Job, some confusion of gloomy skies and storms, and convulsions of nature. *That anatomy of the heart which he gives us in his various narratives of his own feelings, that minute dissection of quivering nerve and tissue, would have been what we should have looked for in his poetry.* But lo, when the moment came, and the prophet was softly persuaded and guided into the delivery of his burden, it was no such wild exposition of the terrors and pangs of the soul that came to his lips. These heavy vapours melted and dispersed from the infinite sweet blueness of the heavens: he forgot himself as if he had never been—and forgot all those miseries of the imagination, those bitter pangs and sorrows, the despair and darkness through which he had stumbled blindly for years. A soft and genial freedom entered into his soul, involuntary smiles came to him, light to his eyes, and to his steps such wandering careless grace, such devious gentle ways, as no one had dreamed of. The country through which the lazy Ouse meandered was new-discovered by the new



poet. It was a torpid, flat, damp midland district; and he a convulsed and sorrow-stricken soul. But ere any one knew the dull fields turned into a fresh and fragrant landscape, a homely sweet epitome of nature, and the man into a new seer according to the ancient meaning of the word, a spectator full of that happy wonder and surprise as at a new sight never revealed to man before, which is the privilege of genius. Something miraculous is in every such revelation. In Cowper it was doubly so; for this new country which he discovered, like Columbus, was old and familiar, and himself long past all the novelties of life.

His first beginning, however, belonged more to the old generation in which he was born than the new, for which he was to prepare the way. It was at the suggestion of Mrs. Unwin, urgently seeking occupation for her patient, and tremulously hopeful that making poetry, even better than making bird-cages would draw him out of himself, that he began the composition of something more important than fugitive verses. It seems to have been necessary for Cowper to have a suggestion from some one to impel him into every exertion, and no doubt in that religious circle it was said and thought that great good might be done, and the best of all causes advanced by poetical discussion of the evils abroad in the world and the cure for them. He was disabled from Evangelical work in the personal way, but here was something which he could do. He took up the suggestion with so much relish that his first volume was entirely written in the cold and gloomy winter days, between December and March, probably the time of the year which alarmed his kind nurses most. It was composed of several poems on abstract subjects—the “Progress of Error,” “Truth,” “Expostulation,” “Hope,” “Charity,” “Retirement,” and “Conversation”—with a poetical dialogue called “Table

Talk," which was supposed to be the most light and amusing, in the front, to beguile the public into the more serious moralities behind. The poetical importance of these productions was small, and there was no novelty either in the treatment or in the subjects to call for special attention. Had he written no more, he would scarcely have found a place with his biographer Hayley, and would have been far from reaching the elevation of his school-fellows Lloyd or Churchill—both of them dead nearly twenty years before. "These poems," says a record of the day, "are written by Mr. Cowper of the Inner Temple, who seems to be a man of a sober and religious tone of mind, with a benevolent heart and a serious wish to inculcate the precepts of morality. He is not, however, possessed of any superior abilities, or the power of genius requisite for so arduous an undertaking." Daring though this seems, it was not any such instance of critical temerity as the attempted slaughter, in later times, of Wordsworth or Keats. The reviewer had solid reason for his opinion. Good sense and virtuous feeling, with a somewhat sectarian onslaught upon phases of society, of which the poet knew little or nothing, characterise these efforts. They are like their titles, essays in verse, containing nothing that had not been said before, nothing that gave any promise of the new fountain of poetry, which was about to spring in so unlooked-for a spot. It may be curious, however, in a literary history, to give the summary made by this respectable and sober Mr. Cowper of the Inner Temple, of the history of literature—

"Ages elapsed ere Homer's lamp appeared,  
And ages ere the Mantuan swan was heard,  
To carry nature lengths unknown before,  
To give a Milton birth, ask'd ages more.  
Thus genius rose and set at order'd times,  
And shot a day-spring into distant climes,

Ennobling ev'ry region that he chose,  
 He sunk in Greece, in Italy he rose,  
 And tedious years of Gothic darkness pass'd,  
 Emerged all splendour in our isle at last.  
 Thus lovely HALEYONS dive into the main,  
 Then show far off their shining plumes again.

In front of these came Addison. In him  
 Humour in holiday and slightly trim,  
 Sublimity and Attic taste, combined  
 To polish, furnish, and delight the mind.  
 Then Pope, as harmony itself exact,  
 In verse well disciplin'd, complete, compact,  
 Gave virtue and morality a grace  
 That, quite eclipsing pleasure's painted face,  
 Levied a tax of wonder and applause,  
 Ev'n on the fools that trampled on their laws.  
 But he (his musical finesse was such,  
 So nice his ear, so delicate his touch)  
 Made poetry a mere mechanic art,  
 And ev'ry warbler has his tune by heart.  
 Nature imparting her satiric gift,  
 Her serious mirth to Arbuthnot and Swift,  
 With droll sobriety they raised a smile  
 At folly's cost, themselves unmoved the while.  
 That constellation set, the world in vain  
 Must hope to look upon their like again.

A. Are we then left—B. Not wholly in the dark,  
 Wit now and then, struck smartly, shows a spark.  
 Sufficient to redeem the modern race  
 From total night and absolute disgrace.  
 While servile trick and imitative knack  
 Confine the million in the beaten track,  
 Perhaps some courser, who disdains the road,  
 Snuffs up the wind and flings himself abroad.

Contemporaries all surpass'd, see one,  
 Short his career, indeed, but ably run.  
 Churchill, himself unconscious of his pow'rs,  
 In penury consumed his idle hours,  
 And, like a scatter'd seed at random sown,  
 Was left to spring by vigour of his own.  
 Lifted at length by dignity of thought,  
 And dint of genius to an affluent lot,

He laid his head in luxury's soft lap,  
And took too often there his easy nap.  
If brighter beams than all he threw not forth,  
'Twas negligence in him, not want of worth.  
Surly and slovenly and bold and coarse,  
Too proud for art, and trusting in mere force,  
Spendthrift alike of money and of wit,  
Always at speed and never drawing bit,  
He struck the lyre in such a careless mood,  
And so disdain'd the rules he understood,  
The laurel seem'd to wait on his command,  
He snatch'd it rudely from the muse's hand."

The reader will perceive that Cowper has no recollection of Shakspeare in the list of "lovely halcyons" reappearing in their shining plumes from the main: but on the other hand, that he has enough of critical discrimination to see the harm that Pope had done to poetry, leaving the "tune" which every warbler could get by heart to check all inspirations. It is a curious symptom, however, of the stagnation in which his mind had lain during his long seclusion, or of the still clinging prejudice of his schoolboy days, that all these twenty years had not modified his opinion of Churchill, or made his lineaments less heroic in the eyes of this other Westminster boy.

To see our poet calmly putting forth this little volume, so commonplace, so didactic, so entirely innocent of any prevision of the stream that was to be opened so soon in the desert, is one of the strangest things in literature. He himself was as little aware of what was coming as anybody else could be. Though he could complain of the tune that every warbler got by heart, he yet jogged on to its measure in an imperfect rendering, with an almost stolid incapacity to perceive that he too was following the hackneyed method. There was never a more remarkable instance of how little a man may know of himself and his own powers. So far as can be

seen, he was not dissatisfied with his production, and it is doubtful whether he ever knew how long a distance there was between these didactic essays and the much greater work that followed. Many passages, however, in them have become the common property of the world. The story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the contrast between the woman who "knew, and knew no more, her Bible true," and the "brilliant Frenchman"—with several other passages, have got among the classic commonplaces of quotation; but whether this would have been the case had not their author become also the author of the "Task," it is difficult to tell. And though his first volume made little or no impression at the time, it became afterwards one of those books, perhaps the most widely popular of all books, which a religious community ventures to adopt as at once amusing and edifying. For such an audience, the cottager who was so much better than Voltaire was a matchless picture. She sits before us with her little mob-cap and her pillow, twisting her bobbins in the pretty frontispiece of an old edition: the comparison was one to dazzle and delight a whole community, to whom it was sweet to see Voltaire set down as he deserved, and the simple believer elevated. The same reason added to the popularity of the "Task." There is no such secret for making literature popular.

At this time, without expectation or warning, a new influence came into Cowper's life. The legend goes that he saw two ladies from his window shopping in the little street of Olney, one of whom was the wife of a neighbouring clergyman; and that he was so much struck by the appearance of the other, that he moved Mrs. Unwin to ask them to tea. Lady Austen "waived ceremony and paid the first visit" in any case. She was "the sister of Mrs. Jones," and the widow of some undistinguished baronet. After the invitation to tea, Cowper

took fright, and had to be coaxed and persuaded to enter the room in which the guests were; but on making the venture, plunged at once into that sudden fervour of intimacy to which shy people are liable. He was not a famous poet in those days, but a poor invalid recluse, with a shadow of madness and misery about him, whose story was inevitably known to all his neighbours, and about whom there could be no delusion possible; but though all this is against the theory that a brilliant, lively, charming, and very likely fanciful woman, such as Lady Austen seems to have been, meant to marry him, it is quite enough to explain the compassionate interest rapidly ripening into warm friendship which moved her at first. Men like Cowper are always interesting to women, and there can be little doubt that, in the dull neighbourhood of Olney, such company and conversation as his would be a godsend to any visitor from livelier scenes. When the new alliance went so far as to induce her to settle in Olney in the adjoining house, with that famous door in the wall first made to facilitate communications between Newton and Cowper, reopened, a stronger motive is no doubt necessary. But it is a vulgar conclusion that marriage must be thought of wherever a man and woman are concerned, and it was the age for romantic friendships. At all events, whatever was the cause, Lady Austen took up her abode in the deserted vicarage. In less than three months their intimacy had sprung to such a height, that they were Anna, Mary, and William to each other—with still fonder additions: *my* Anna and *her* William were, however, epithets which the taste of the time, as well as the affectionateness of the religious circle permitted, and Cowper was precisely the kind of man with whom such relationships are practicable. He was affectionate without a touch of passion. He was utterly disabled by the misfortunes of his life from any

independent personal action ; he was poor and dependent upon his friends ; he was fifty. The mere notion of a man so circumstanced calling forth the idea of marriage at all seems inconceivable. Strange must have been the humility, wonderful the self-sacrifice of the woman who could entertain such a thought ; and the gay high-spirited capricious woman who is supposed to be the second who formed designs upon the valetudinarian, shows no symptom of being either humble or self-devoted. She liked, no doubt, to have a man of unusual gifts under her influence, and was flattered by her own evident power to turn him hither and thither as she would : but that she would have made the sacrifice of her life to him, is a suggestion of which there is not the slightest evidence, and one which all the facts of the case go to disprove.

However, it is vain to attempt to throw light upon a story which has often been discussed without any conclusion, and of which we shall never know the *fin mot*, if *fin mot* there was. What is certain is that the society of this lady had the most remarkable effect upon the as yet undeveloped poet of fifty. He who had written respectable platitudes with perfect satisfaction to himself yesterday, burst forth all at once into poetry, genuine, original, and often great, emancipating his age as well as himself from all servile bonds. Moral essays of the most respectable and unexceptional kind one year, in conformity with all the canons, yet getting from the public nothing better than a respectful yawn ; and in the next the "Task," with all its indifference to law and rule, its freedom and discursiveness, its unvarnished nature and truth. That the transition from Mrs. Unwin as muse to Lady Austen could have made all this difference is as wonderful as anything else in the tale. But so it would seem to have been. His Anna touched the right chord in the heart of this middle-aged man of genius. She

told him the story of John Gilpin, and he, lying awake half the night laughing over it, produced next day the ballad which carries John Gilpin to posterity. She spoke to him of the Royal George, and the bell which he set tolling for the brave still sounds in all the echoes. She gave him a task, telling him that he could write on any subject, even on her sofa, and lo, the greatest poem of his generation came into being. The impulse is too distinct to be mistaken. He was a man who never did anything, of his own initiative: but he who wrote "Table Talk" at Mrs. Unwin's suggestion, and was pleased with his work, does not seem the same man as he who wrote the "Task" at Lady Austen's. We can only wonder at the extraordinary difference; we cannot explain it.

Here then, after all this long preface, we have arrived at the moment when the latent forces which had been lying unknown all these years burst forth, unthought of and unsuspected; and the recluse by his chimney corner, where he wound silks for "the fair," and read the newspaper to them, and hugged himself in the snugness of domestic bliss, became the reformer of literature and the father of a new poetic age. The transition is so wonderful that it is beyond the comprehension of the spectator. He who had jogged so pleasantly in the old yoke for one stage, cast bit and bridle entirely from him in the next, renounced his old high and dry moral subjects, his classical illusions, his balanced couplets, and set out unfettered, as if he had been a new creature, upon that new yet old familiar way. We see no preparation, no gradual stirring up of poetical enthusiasm, only a little pleasant banter which made the social evening pass all the more brightly. Probably Lady Austen, who loved brightness and life, did not take any great pleasure in "Table Talk" or the "Progress of Error." Why should not he try blank



verse? the charmed and flattered poet was very willing to do anything to please her. And thus all at once he passed from the conventional to the real—to a genuine land of inspiration. That his poetical faith had not changed, and that he had not received any new light from contemporary events, is evident from the verses we have quoted, in which Churchill still holds the palm, as he had done in Cowper's mind twenty years before. He had not been brought to love better things by anything that had happened since then. Indeed nothing had happened—a few ingenious gentlemen had published poems, the names of which alone may be found in the records, but which the world has long since forgotten. Goldsmith indeed, who was Cowper's contemporary, had published since Churchill's time his "Deserted Village," which, if not as famous as his immortal Vicar, was still worthy of a higher place than Churchill; but Cowper, it is evident, was of the other faction in literature, disliked Johnson, and took no pleasure in Goldsmith. Thomson, indeed, might have lent real aid in opening his eyes to nature, but Thomson himself was not free of classic bondage; and Cowper had neither teachers nor models in his generation. But being told to take up an old system and a forgotten measure, he did so, and made in it the triumph of his life.

To compare the "Task" with any of the other poems of the age would be too long a process. Nature had not been banished from literature; but she appeared there trim and dressed, her fields and her hedgerows, her halls and cottages, all in neat and orderly lines, with here a rustic Chloe, and there a languishing Strephon, not to speak of the Naiads and the wood-nymphs, and soft Ausonian breezes, and Eolus, and Boreas, and all their crew. But when Cowper stepped forth into the rural landscape, the whole of these attendant figures were scat-

tered to the winds. He paused in all due faithfulness to do his best, and "sing the Sofa," for "the Fair commands the song;" but scarcely has he put that piece of furniture together, when he steps abroad into the soft yet brisk air outside, where there is no classical torpor, or any of those "halcyons" which he had himself celebrated, but "a ruffling wind" blowing in his face as he stands on the top of the low hill, and sees with a pleasure never exhausted

"Ouse slow-winding through a level plain  
Of spacious meads, with cattle sprinkled o'er."

Nothing could be more lawless, less regular. Even Mr. Benham, and Mr. Goldwin Smith, his last biographers, are compelled to remark that the reflections, as a rule, are not "naturally suggested by the preceding passage." "From the use of a sofa by the gouty to those who, being free from the gout, do not need sofas, and so to country walks and country life, is hardly a natural transition." One of the great points in the work, indeed, is that we are made at once entirely independent of natural transition. When he leaves the sofa, and steps suddenly outside, all inconsequent and out of rule, the reader is ready to applaud out of sheer satisfaction and relief. What should detain the poet, that soft yet cordial morning, not too still, with a "ruffling wind" about, and "the distant plough slow-moving in the fields"? He stands and gazes, and we with him, till the wind rising "sweeps the skirts of some far-spreading wood," and the branches wave in the blast, and the sound of waters breaks into and completes the cadences of nature. At a touch this wide and fresh landscape, where "the sloping land recedes into the clouds," and where the winds sweep so far and free, and the rills chime upon their pebbles, has enlarged the world itself and

all that is therein. The rigid old pictures are like a child's sketches, all in hard lines, with no gradations of surface; but here we have at once the true artist, whose colours melt into each other, and under whose hands the depths of air and wonders of the half-seen distance come upon the canvas one cannot tell how. Perhaps it is above all this atmosphere, new to verse, which is the special charm of Cowper's landscapes; the crisp air blows about us as we read, carrying out of the depths a hundred sounds—bells from the distant towers, the voice of waters, the rhythmic rustle of the trees, and those far-off occasional notes of keener meaning, which betray a human population scattered around; or, with a still more delicate touch, the wintry landscape, frozen and still, breathes about us—

“No noise is here, or none that hinders thought;  
The redbreast warbles still, but is content  
With slender notes, and more than half suppress'd,  
Pleased with his solitude, and flitting light,  
From spray to spray; where'er he rests, he shakes  
From many a twig the pendant drops of ice  
That twinkle in the withered leaves below.”

In every season he has no conventional picture before him, but the scene itself in all its truth and reality, revealed by the companionship of years. None of its changing moods is lost upon him. He sees the cattle how they stand about in the torpor of the cold, and the sheep how they scatter upon the spring pastures, and the horse

“That skims the spacious meadow at full speed,  
Then stops, and snorts, and, throwing high his heels,  
Starts to the voluntary race again,”

in the rapture of the genial season. Nothing so daring in adherence to fact, nothing so free from all consideration of what is, or is not, permitted by poetical canons,

had ever been put into verse before. After all the freedom of the following age, and the flood of realism which has swept away so many barriers, we still wonder and even smile at Cowper's boldness. How he could have ventured in this first step out of the bondage of the schools to the "stercoraceous heap" which fumes at full length in his pages, it is impossible to tell. Had he been a rebel born, long plotting the emancipation of his art, he could not have gone farther, and no one since, so far as we are aware, has ever gone so far. Perhaps as a literary pioneer, the fugleman of the coming army, it was well that his audacity should be beyond example as well as beyond imitation. But it is more difficult to trace the process in his gentle individuality, which made this boldness practicable. Possibly his very seclusion, the narrowness of his immediate audience, the certainty that none of his wanderings, either in prose or verse, would be without interest to them, gave him the necessary boldness. He followed the course of his own musings, of his own daily routine, wayward yet regular, with no immediate contemplation of the public, with only a pleased consciousness of the half-amusement, half-horror, of the parlour—Mrs. Unwin, suspending her needles in consternation as the cucumber-bed came into full view, while the livelier Anna put down her embroidery and clapped her hands at her poet's daring. They would laugh over it, no doubt, as they sipped their tea, and anticipate with many a gentle jest the confusion of the critics, and persuade poor Mary, half-bewildered, to laugh too. And with what delightful enthusiasm the two women would receive the picture of that domestic blessedness which they themselves had made, and look round upon the originals of the picture, the close-drawn curtains, the sofa warm in the firelight, the urn upon the table: and feel the very needle working "patiently into the snowy lawn."

to be made immortal. And so it has been. The fashion of that blessedness has almost passed away, at least from the imagination of England; but those who practically love it least cannot refuse to be moved by the warmth and repose and tender grace of that immortal parlour. Not Adam and Eve in their paradise, not Alexander throned and triumphant, with lovely Thais beside him, has kept a more permanent place in the world's picture gallery. It is not a lofty kind of bliss perhaps, but nothing could be more perfect within its limits. And the delightful union and warmth is enhanced by the consciousness that the three people who form this happy circle are all solitaries in the social economy, not fixed by right in this happy routine, but giving each to each in voluntary kindness and the delicate affinity of friendship those elements of happiness which make their shelter so complete an emblem of the home. Had it been a home of the ordinary type, it would not have suited the uses of the poet so well. But his skill and instinct entirely blind us to the fact that this picture, at once so ideal and so real, is by its constitution entirely removed from the orthodox household. In all likelihood it never occurred to himself that it was so.

Everybody knows this picture. It is the one characteristic scene by which, more than anything else, the poet is enshrined in popular opinion. And there is no doubt that his own generation was more grateful to him for this sublimation of their common life, and glorification of the fireside, than for all he did beside. It opened to him a thousand hearts in that great unknown mass which says little for itself, and is no adept in criticism; but which, when once it loves a book, carries it clear of all comment into a fame which is beyond discussion and above praise. How different it was from that scene in which Belinda's petticoat occupies so much space! as

different as are the tiresome belle and beau with all their fripperies from the wholesome intercourse of actual life. The one, like the other, is an interior; in the one, as in the other, "the fair" is the sovereign of the domain. The very words of the Popish era still lingered on Cowper's tongue. But the whole atmosphere and every suggestion had been transformed. The "Rape of the Lock" was an innocent rape enough, but the inspiring fancy of the scene is, without intention, fundamentally impure. The encroachments of the gallant, and the half-fictitious resistance and simulated rage of the lady belong to a series of adventures older and more persistently followed than anything else in literature. That there is no harm in them is a mere accident. But Cowper changed altogether the spirit of the meeting and the meeting-place. No hot pursuit or amorous conflict, but a sweet and sober union of minds and hearts, a calm of perfect satisfaction, a mutual understanding, harmony and dependence, each upon each, are in his pages. Hazardous encounters there had been plenty; even in Richardson's virtuous novels assaults upon what is called female virtue were the invariable theme, and every women's mind was concentrated upon the determination to save her honour. But with a touch the fastidious gentle poet, fastidious in taste, pure in nature, religious in heart, made an end of all this. The honourable placid house in which men and women stood together in mutual support and sympathy and tenderness, without a suggestion of evil, was created by his hand—or say, rather, disclosed, for he was no creator. In all ages the bulk of mankind thus lives, without any fermentation of passion or illicit fancy. In the worst of times, vice is the exception. If it is rampant in high places, it is hated below. If youth is noisy and uncontrolled, the very ordinance of nature which turns men and women into

fathers and mothers, teaches them that only by means of social virtue is life possible. But up to this time no one had ventured to make the fireside heroic, or set it in the front of all that is happy and beautiful. To almost all the women and a great number of the men of his age, this one achievement was enough to earn him everlasting gratitude. Cowper became the poet of the domestic circle, the apostle of the home. Even to those who did not receive with any relish the religious meditations into which his verse so easily flowed, this poetical adoption of the centre of domestic peace was almost a personal happiness.

We have said that Cowper was no creator; but when we turn to the bold and well-defined figures that cross his landscape, set down without a single wavering line or artificial grace, the force of portraiture almost reaches the height of creation. No pretty ideal figures, no Damon and Musidora, no gay Lothario or lovely Lavinia, are there. Never was a more distinct and real person than the woodman going out to his work in the morning across the snowy fields. They are all so well known that we hesitate to quote, but this picture is one which, though so simply real, can never be looked upon without a keen imaginative pleasure—

“Forth goes the woodman, leaving unconcerned  
The cheerful haunts of man, to wield the axe  
And drive the wedge, in yonder forest drear,  
From morn to eve his solitary task.  
Shaggy and lean and shrewd, with pointed ears  
And tail cropped short, half lurcher and half cur,  
His dog attends him. Close behind his heel  
Now creeps he slow, and now with many a frisk,  
Wide-scamp’ring, snatches up the drifted snow  
With iv’ry teeth, or ploughs it with his snout;  
Then shakes his powder’d coat, and barks for joy.  
Heedless of all his pranks, the sturdy churl  
Moves right toward the mark; nor stops for aught,

But now and then, with pressure of his thumb,  
T' adjust the fragrant charge of a short tube,  
That fumes beneath his nose ; the trailing cloud  
Streams far behind him, scenting all the air."

We repeat that scarcely any poet since, even Wordsworth in the height of his polemical determination to employ common words and images instead of those appropriated to the use of poetry—has put so bold a sketch upon paper: and yet it is so entirely appropriate and true, that not a word but of applause can be said. Here is no wilful descent from the worthy to the mean, as in the case of Betty Foy and Peter Bell. The poet is as completely devoid of the affectation of a revolutionary as it is possible to imagine. His woodman crosses the wintry landscape, because in the first place he did so, an excellent reason, yet not all-sufficient in art; and secondly because he is the very soul of the bare and wintry season, he, and his dog, and his pipe—setting out to his work in sturdy rural indifference, consoling himself with such warmth as is possible, the one workman whom the snow does not stop, whose axe supplies one of the few familiar welcome sounds that break the spell of the silence. The picture in all its glistening whiteness, the sharp keen pleasure of the new-fallen snow, which goes to the hearts of dogs and children, the man's stolid straightforward course, satisfy our mind with a perfection of composition which yet is pure and simple nature. A little while before, Cowper himself would have put a moral lesson instead of this living group; and Thomson, shivering, would have painted us an ideal incident—but poetry had now found its eyes, and its completest simple inspiration.

And who does not remember the companion picture? The poet does not see it with actual eyesight—but warm and cheerful indoors, with the firelight brightening the



winter gloaming, hears "the twanging horn on yonder bridge," and beholds the messenger in his mind's eye—as we, too, do, with a sense of elation and expectation borrowed from him, though the news that comes to us every hour or so has worn out, so far as our minds are concerned, that warm alert attention and sense of pleasure.

"He comes, the herald of a noisy world,  
With spattered boots, strapped waist, and frozen locks,  
News from all nations lumbering at his back,  
Yet careless what he brings, his one concern  
Is to conduct it to the destined inn,  
And having dropped th' expected bag, pass on—  
He whistles as he goes, light-hearted wretch!  
Cold and yet cheerful; messenger of grief  
Perhaps to thousands, and of joy to some,  
To him indifferent whether grief or joy;  
Houses in ashes, and the fall of stocks,  
Births, deaths, and marriages, epistles wet  
With tears that trickled down the writer's cheek  
Fast as the periods from his fluent quill;  
Or charged with amorous sigh of absent swains,  
Or nymph responsive, equally affect  
His horse and him, unconscious of them all."

This is one of the sights which has been entirely swept away from our experience. None of us remember that functionary as the bearer of Her Majesty's mails—but yet how true, how easy, how full of the very spirit of the night is this representation of the wayfarer, whom we hear passing from behind Cowper's curtains. In spite of ourselves we feel the thrill of gentle excitement and eagerness. Though we are deluged with newspapers, and have so many posts a day, yet we understand it all better than the things we have seen with our own eyes; the moon reflected in the wintry flood, the dim lamps at the end of the wearisome long bridge, the little town half asleep in the slumbrous cold, but rousing with

quicken pulses at the clattering hoofs and cheerful horn—and at his window the spectator, glancing out in a warm dim glow of firelight, and the little circle all expectant of the evening's reading, the imprisoned wranglers that are to be set free, and all the tumult of great London that is about to echo in the quiet, and make it still more warm, more soft and sweet.

This delightful picture, however, recalls to us the great defect in Cowper's poetry, though no doubt it was one of the qualities which gained it instant acceptance with the crowd. It is that he cannot enjoy this happy seclusion of his, nor picture forth the domestic perfection of his life without a comparison, very much to the disadvantage of all the rest of the world, who are not so happy as he. While he and those kind companions whose chief thought is how to make him happiest, "welcome peaceful evening in" in their manner, he cannot help making an invidious comparison—

"Not such his evening, who with shining face  
Sweats in the crowded theatre, and squeezed,  
And bored with elbow points, through both his sides  
Outcolds the ranting actor on the stage ;  
Nor his who patient stands till his feet throb,  
And his head thumps to feed upon the breath  
Of patriots bursting with heroic rage,  
Or placemen all tranquillity and smiles."

This runs all through his great work. He can never describe his own good fortune without joining to the picture its inevitable contrast; as if it were a moral advantage to spend one's life in gentle idleness, and like the lilies of the field, neither to toil nor spin. He has no perception that his fireside, so sweet, so tranquil, so placid, is not the first and finest of the scenes of human life. "I crown thee king of intimate delights," he cries, addressing winter—

“ Fireside enjoyments, homeborn happiness,  
And all the comforts that the lowly roof  
Of undisturbed retirement, and the hours  
Of long uninterrupted evening know.”

And then his complacency bursts forth once more.

“ No rattling wheels stop short before these gates,  
No powdered pert proficient in the art  
Of sounding an alarm, assaults these doors  
Till the street rings.”

He cannot be content with being exceptionally blessed himself; he must point his happiness with the reflection that the greater part of the world is less happy than he; and in doing this, every amusement passes under his lash; the theatre especially he returns to again and again, to point out its inferiority—and all the frivolous congregations of men.

This, however, though a great drawback in point of art, and not a small one in charity, was quite in accordance with the spirit of the religious revival which then reigned with passionate force in England over a large proportion of those classes to which Cowper's poetry appealed. Something of a natural revulsion from the artificial pre-eminence of “society,” and that atmosphere, which, from the days of the *Spectator* to those of the “Rape of the Lock,” had infected literature, setting up the pettiest subjects, and supposing a universal interest in ruffles and powder, which no wholesome nation ever was really possessed by—was no doubt in the theory that “God made the country, but man made the town,” which is the oft-repeated principle of the poet's philosophy. But stronger than this and more earnest was that long-standing religious objection to all the paths of pleasure (so called), an objection much older than Wesley, which never fails to accompany every great religious movement. No theory ever is so persistent, so profoundly rooted in

human nature, as to form part of movements differing in every other respect, without having a foundation of truth and justice which is unassailable. The evils which result from social excitement and pursuit of pleasure, the vices that creep in, the feverish appetite, which grows by what it feeds on, for more and more highly spiced diversion, the extravagance in mind, in fashion, and in purse, into which, almost always, the tide of pleasure betrays those who are carried away by it, are patent enough to all beholders. And since the day when St. Paul warned his converts against "fleshly lusts that war against the soul," there has never been a revival of earnest religious feeling without this crusade against amusements, innocent enough perhaps in themselves, yet a possible fount of evil. The prejudice of the Methodists and Evangelicals was not more strong than that of their predecessors in every reformation; but it is nearer to ourselves and more easily perceptible. In the case of such a poet as Cowper, it has a tinge of something ungenerous in it which rouses our prejudices in their turn. He who was so severe upon all the pleasures of worldly life was a man incapable of any share in them—"a stricken deer" who had left the herd, a being unfit in body and still more in mind for the enjoyments he decried. His domestic blessedness was not arrived at by a series of sacrifices and renunciations of more brilliant happiness, but was what he liked best, the only kind of pleasure of which he was really capable. And on the other hand, the gentle audience which he addressed, which was neither the highest nor the lowest, but the mass between, the great middle of society, upon the vast level of which there are neither the brilliant lights nor the tragic darkness which affect the extremes of life, was like himself out of the way of the tide of fashion and social excitement. It was and always must be to the bulk of any

people, rather a pleasure than a pain to be assured that high life is full of wretchedness and danger, and pleasure in all its manifestations a road to ruin. This gives a disagreeable aspect always to the fulminations of a pious recluse, and all the wide-spread and oft-repeated strictures of the retired and humble upon the gay and great. They are damning sins they have no mind to, they are dignifying their own mild and moderate possibilities with an air of noble virtue and superiority to meaner motive. But in those days people were not sufficiently at leisure to remark this. Only a generation before, Hogarth had painted those terrible discourses on canvas, which made the results of a "gay" life apparent to the duller eyes—and Richardson and Fielding had revealed such an imbroglio of vices under the calm of ordinary life as might well have affrighted the reader. Thus Cowper's theology was scarcely to blame for the tone he took; but yet his theology gave it a deeper meaning, and pointed the shaft which all the moralists had already sharpened. To us it is the drawback, the attendant bitter to so much sweetness; to a great part of his audience, no doubt, it was the chief interest and value of his work.

But while the "Task" was in the course of writing, alas, there came into that safe, most sheltered corner, where no crevice seemed to exist through which any serpent could crawl, some of those petty miseries of which society in its turn accuses retirement and domestic life. How it was no one knows. The vulgar mind concludes easily that Lady Austen would have married the poet, and that Mrs. Unwin was jealous. Cowper himself writes a few somewhat spiteful and petty letters on the subject, putting his kind visitor, his gay and sweet companion, vaguely in the wrong; and Hayley, his biographer, with that injurious "hushing up" which conveys a worse impression than any explanations, attri-

butes the break to "a trifling feminine discord." But the only thing certain about it, is that we shall never know what it was. There had been a coolness shortly after the beginning of their alliance, which was got over; but the second breach was final; before even the book which she had inspired was finished, Lady Austen departed. Cowper's explanation of it to Lady Hesketh, who did not know her, was that the habit of "paying my devoirs to her ladyship every morning at eleven," interrupted his work. "I was forced to neglect the 'Task' to attend upon the Muse who had inspired the subject," he says, with an ungenerous and petty tone in his self-defence. "But she had ill-health, and before I had quite finished the work, was obliged to repair to Bristol." The friendship had lasted altogether about three years. Some soreness, it is evident, there was about the breach, which prompts Cowper's lengthy letters on the subject; but that is all we know. These letters ended with a forlorn boast, that "the cause of so many interruptions" being removed, "we have seldom any company at all." Newton had been very doubtful as to that pleasant addition to their life, and the "interruptions" which threatened to give Cowper a brighter surrounding, and he was no doubt pleased that the lively woman, who knew the world and had kept up her relations with it, was gone.

But it is not too much to say that all that was best in Cowper's life went with her. His work kept him up as long as it was in hand; but the last shadows soon began to creep up from the autumnal fields. Out of the sudden light which had fallen upon his life, he went back into the old monotony with a subdued, half fretful, half proud submission. His letters, especially to Newton, grew more and more melancholy. It is true that they had always been of a dejected tone, and that he had scarcely ever ceased to represent himself to the former

director of his spiritual life, as a despairing sinner shut out from God's grace ; but it is difficult to believe in the despair of the man who spent so many cheerful days by Lady Austen's side, who stuck in the mud with his Mary, and wrote John Gilpin after a night sleepless with laughter. Fortunately the blank left by Lady Austen's disappearance did not long continue. His cousin, Lady Hesketh, his correspondence with whom had been dropped for years, one day wrote to him, moved by some sudden impulse of kindness, and, with the eagerness of a man who was longing for friendship and society, he flung himself upon her. With all his tender-heartedness, Cowper was a man to whom one devoted ministrant was just about as good as another, and it is evident that his need of some one to vary the routine of existence was greater than it had ever been. "We are all growing young again, and the days that I thought I should see no more are actually returning," he cried in his pleasure. And Lady Hesketh did not confine herself to letter-writing ; she offered help, if his circumstances required, and he accepted the offer with a frankness and simplicity, which no doubt made the matter easier at once to her and to himself, but which startles the reader, who perhaps has forgotten that all this time the poet has been dependent upon his family, receiving almost all his living from the benevolence of his relations. Lady Hesketh brought him into renewed intercourse with several members of his family, and his life seemed once more to brighten. He wrote the poem called "Tirocinium," in order to make out the volume, which the "Task" by itself was too short to fill, and a few days after began his translation of Homer ; which showed that his mind was in full activity, and that neither he nor his friends had forgotten the importance to his well-being of constant occupation.

These two facts, however, which one would have

thought would have rejoiced all interested in him—his reunion with his relations, and his voluntary commencement of an important piece of work—seem to have alarmed and provoked the interference of Newton, who could not, it appears, consent to give up his supreme spiritual authority over his former penitent. No doubt Lady Austen had shaken it, but she had happily disappeared; and the incoming of a more permanent and legitimate influence gave to the jealous priest—for the character is one, be it Jesuit or Evangelical—a deeper alarm. It was thought that Homer, a pagan, was “greatly below the attention” of a Christian poet, and not a becoming occupation for him; and also that the society of his carnally-minded relations would do him harm. Cowper, however, is not so humble but that he takes up arms for himself at this interference. He cannot amuse himself now, he says, as he once could, with carpenters’ or gardeners’ tools, squirrels, or guinea-pigs. A man’s mind has been restored to him, and it must be occupied accordingly. Neither has he any connections of a kind to injure his spiritual life. So unwarrantable a pretension does not make the gentle poet angry, but still he has enough of spirit to repel it. A still more unwarrantable interference was attempted a little later when Lady Hesketh, in her turn, fixed her residence temporarily at Olney, in order to be near the lonely pair. She was one of Cowper’s nearest relations, warranted by family ties and superior fortune to look after him, without fear of any misinterpretation of her conduct; and she soon perceived that the “cruel solitude” of the little town was weighing heavily upon him. Accordingly she lost no time in renting for him a house in the neighbouring village of Weston, from which immediate access could be obtained to the Throckmorton grounds, which were his delight. Cowper’s exultation over this new dwelling-



place, its "genteel" aspect, its roominess and airiness, and manifold attractions, is like the boundless satisfaction of a child; and his letters to Newton on this subject are written with a certain deprecatory fulness, as if to disarm reproof.

But these simple wiles were unavailing. Some weeks after Newton let loose his thunderbolt; this time it was addressed to Mrs. Unwin, and it seems to have plunged them both into trouble. "The purport of it," Cowper says, "is a direct accusation of me and of her, an accusation implied that we have both diverged into forbidden paths, and led a life unbecoming the Gospel—that many of my friends in London are grieved, and the simple people of Olney astonished; that *he never so much doubted my restoration to Christian privileges*, as now that I converse too much with people of the world, and find too much pleasure in doing so." There could not be a more painful evidence that the most religious of men can be as brutal as the lowest, than this fiery arrow of Newton's "doubt" as to "the restoration of Christian privileges;" a delusion in the poet's mind which he had combated with all his might for years, which he knew had its origin in insanity, yet which in this moment of passion he suddenly adopts and sanctions, uncared of the misery which it might produce. And this outburst was founded solely on the fact that the poor recluse had got to be on friendly terms with the Throckmortons, and that Lady Hesketh frequently drove him and his companion out! The poet condescends to go over all this ground again in another letter to his angry Pope, which is full of explanation and proof that he does not deserve the chastisement he has received. But even now he does not assert his freedom of action, or do more than defend his "consistency" against the impertinent and cruel attack. This is enough to show, however, how little safe his delicate nature

and distempered soul were in the hands of a friend so masterful and remorseless.

Newton, however, was right in one point, that the translation of Homer was not the best work that Cowper could have taken up. But he was a man absolutely dependent upon others for suggestions and starting-points, and was incapable himself of striking out his further path. It is almost ludicrous to see the little stir about him of all his friends, the nurses, servants, and worshippers of the helpless poet, all tremblingly desirous of finding him something to do, and straining after a new subject, while he stands by in amiable weakness, and approves the anxious suggestions, but without any motive to set to work at them, such as Lady Austen had furnished. Lady Hesketh suggested the Mediterranean, about as strange a theme as could have been thought of. A curate in the neighbourhood thought that the Four Ages had never been adequately treated. This discussion convinces us that we are still in the eighteenth century, in the period when an abstract subject was the natural foundation of a poetical essay. But Cowper, though he listened to them all with so much docility, perhaps knew that poetical essays were not so much worth the doing now-a-days, and that he had said the most of his say in this world. Homer was good steady work, and the "mechanic exercise" of the verse was soothing to him. He got wholesome occupation, and he got a thousand pounds out of this huge task, so much bigger yet less great than the other task which had been concerned with subjects more homely than gods and heroes. It is not a work that counts for much in the story of his career. It is astonishing how like in sound and cadence a bit of this oldest and greatest of epics sounds to the "Winter Evening," or the "Walk at Noon," as we read it, though these poems are certainly not very like Homer. It was

when he had completed this that the new subject was so much discussed and looked for; but by that time no new subject charmed him. He had fallen again into the deepest depths, and Mrs. Unwin had been struck by his side with the first touch of paralysis, that most solemn of warnings. Nothing could be more dismal than the condition of the faithful pair in this stage. She grew exigent and selfish (as they say) who had been all devotion, demanding perpetual attention from him, and babbling in half intelligible words and frequent anger, when he was otherwise occupied; and he strained every nerve to be of use to the invalid who had so often nursed him. There could be no severer lesson upon the inexpediency of such alliances than the way in which kind Lady Hesketh speaks of Mrs. Unwin at this melancholy stage of existence. The poor old lady has no right to be there among all those cousins, and though they are kind to her, yet she is out of place and bores them. The story is dipped in the very darkest hues of domestic tragedy. "Here is a muse of seventy that I perfectly idolise," says Hayley, who in these days was half as good a poet as Cowper, and very well known through the length and breadth of the land; but Lady Hesketh speaks of her as "Madame," and can scarcely restrain her weariness of the feeble and suffering old woman. And thus the last days went mournfully on.

It was, however, in the last glimmering of evening light before his life sank altogether in the darkness, that Cowper wrote two of his finest productions—two of the most exquisite poems in the language—every line of which is instinct with a profound and chastened feeling to which it would be difficult to find a parallel. These are the lines "Addressed to my Mother's Picture," and those entitled "My Mary." Poetry has never produced any utterances more tender and true. They are without

passion, for passion does not belong to filial love; and there is not a phrase in them, not a word which could jar upon the most susceptible ear, not a touch that is extravagant or excessive. This was the one love he knew. Other affections had skimmed over him, calling forth here and there a "swallow-flight" of song: this one love alone was fully possible to him, the love half reverential, half protecting, without fear or doubt, or a possibility of delusion in it, which a son bears to his mother. The fact that he who gave forth these supreme utterances of filial affection was himself old when he produced them, brings into the relationship a tender quality which is marvelously touching. The two women whom he thus celebrates are at once greater and more lowly than he, his saints, his servants, his companions. Gratitude—in the one case visionary, in the other how real—a sense of dependence, a sense of tender superiority, mingle and blend as poetry never blended them before. Poor Mr. Hayley, Cowper's "brother-poet," with just as genuine feeling, celebrated his mother, who had preserved his life by her miraculous care from an illness which threatened mind and body.

"'Twas thine with constant love, through lingering years,  
To bathe thy infant orphan in thy tears,"

says this excellent man though indifferent poet. But Cowper, though his head was all confused and astray among the gathering glooms, and his heart quivering with a thousand arrows, never errs. Any of his true lovers who was asked to supply an example of the poet at perfection, would reply with one of these two poems. They are the expression of the master-feeling of his life.

The last years of all are too sad to dwell upon. Mrs. Unwin would seem to have dropped into that imbecility of weakness which is the most tragic and humiliating

conclusion to which this sad humanity is subject: while he, fallen into the very depths of visionary anguish, sat "still and silent as death," speaking to no one, asking nothing, dwelling in a gloomy world of his own, from which in heaven or earth there seemed no outlet. When his Mary died he made no sign of feeling, being lost in the stupor of his own gathering malady. He sat silent with wild sad eyes in the Norfolk parsonage, to which he had been removed, and had novels read to him the live-long day (Evelina for one), finding in them, heaven knows what pitiful solace for woes that were never to be cured in this world. Sometimes the moaning of the sea would soothe him; sometimes he would rouse ~~up~~ to make a mechanical correction of his Homer; sometimes even he would write a cold and gloomy letter—for one of his delusions was that he had ceased to be capable of affection for any one—to his cousin. All that tender care and affection could do for him was done. He survived his faithful companion more than three years, but they were years of darkness, without hope or consolation. A year before his death an incident in a book he was reading, *Anson's Voyages*, caught his troubled fancy, and he wrote the last of all his poems, and the saddest. Pacing up and down in the failing light of the evening, the picture of the drowning sailor, "such a destined wretch as I," grows before him.

"He long survives, who lives an hour  
 In ocean, self-upheld:  
 And so long he, with unspent power,  
 His destiny repelled:  
 And ever, as the minutes flew,  
 Entreated help, or cried—'Adieu!'  
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"At length, his transient respite past,  
 His comrades, who before  
 Had heard his voice in every blast,  
 Could catch the sound no more:

For then, by toil subdued, he drank  
The stifling wave, and then he sank.

“ No poet wept him ; but the page  
Of narrative sincere,  
That tells his name, his worth, his age,  
Is wet with Anson's tear :  
And tears by bards or heroes shed  
Alike immortalise the dead.

“ I therefore purpose not, or dream,  
Descanting on his fate,  
To give the melancholy theme  
A more enduring date :  
But misery still delights to trace  
Its semblance in another's case.

“ No voice divine the storm allayed,  
No light propitious shone,  
When, snatched from all effectual aid,  
We perished, each alone :  
But I, beneath a rougher sea,  
And whelmed in deeper gulphs than he.”

This is the last sound that comes to us out of the darkness in which Cowper was fast disappearing. Never had a harmless life so miserable an ending. He went down in those deep waters without even that gleam of light at the last, which so often gives pathetic gladness to an ending life. Unconsoled, he was swallowed up by those billows. The last words he said were, when he was offered a cordial, “ What can it signify ? ” What, indeed, did it matter, an hour of weakness, more or less, a pain the greater ? By that time the gloom had reached its blackest, the light was near. What did it signify ? Who can doubt that all the ceaseless sufferings of his life, all his miseries, some hours thereafter, had become as dreams to him in the great and new revelation that awaited him at the gates of heaven ?

His life had been a harmless life ; but yet it had

been full of trouble to himself, and all who were concerned in it, as unsatisfactory a human existence as ever was. But what he failed altogether to accomplish for himself he did for literature. He had not force enough to break any bonds of his own; on the contrary, his hapless feet were always getting entangled in new ones, and at the very last, after his partial escape from the potent sway of such a man as Newton, he made a poor little dictator for himself out of a pompous village pedagogue, to whom he laid bare all the tortures of his heart. But while he was bound in spirit he was free in his genius, as no man else in his generation was free. Academical rule and precedent had no sway over him; he went out of the schools of the poets a gentle rebel, casting all their leading strings to the winds, not saying a word of revolt, but with a quiet obstinacy taking his own way. He would not be bound even to logic or sequence, but waved all those limitations lightly from him, and did as Fancy bade, with no defiance, but only a gentle natural waywardness. He saw, with eyes as clear as truth itself, what was before him in the soft fresh outside world, in which there was no intoxicating loveliness but only a modest English landscape; and taste and inclination at once refused to bring in any foreign images, finding that enough, and the genuine humanity that peopled it. He was bold to say what was in him, and to say it his own way; he had the courage to step back in the course of time, and bring his model from higher sources than those of the Augustan age. He broke the spell of Pope, and opened the way to Wordsworth and all the singers that were being born, while he languished and agenisied. The world would have been a different world for them if Cowper had not been.

WILLIAM COWPER, born 1731 ; died 1800.

Published Table Talk Truths .	}	1782.
„ Progress of Error, etc. .	}	
„ The Task . . .	}	1784
„ Tiocinium . . .	}	
„ Translation of Homer		1791.



## CHAPTER II.

## ROBERT BURNS.

WHILE Cowper was wasting his early manhood in London doing nothing, and knowing nothing either of the misery or the importance of his future life, a child was born in a clay hut among the Ayrshire wilds, in that far-distant and unknown realm of Scotland, which, though united to England by the closest bonds, was yet almost as little known to Englishmen as any foreign country. It is very difficult to realise to ourselves, indeed, what that country was before Burns and before Scott. No country in the world has owed so much to literature; and we doubt if all the enterprise and spirit of the race could ever have produced the prosperity and wealth which is now its portion, without the stimulating touch of that revelation which made Scotland enchanted ground to all Europe, and has made her sons proud, wherever they have gone, to claim her name. No two men in the world were ever more unlike than the English gentleman, gently bred and well connected, but indolent, timid, and helpless, and the impassioned peasant, full of strong desires and impulses, rash, headstrong, and daring, whose lamp of genius was infinitely more vivid, and his place in poetry greater, but whose warm flesh and blood encumbered his way even more than madness and misery did that of his contemporary. They never met, and knew

little of each other; nevertheless, their work had a similar influence. The one in his blue bonnet, the other in his invalid night-cap, they stand at the great gates which had been neatly barred and bolted by the last generation, and, pushing them abroad upon their unwilling hinges, made English poetry free as she had been before.

The mind of Burns and his career launches us into an entirely changed atmosphere and new scene. He was a son of the soil, without education, without culture, without friends; all he had in the world, save a well-knit frame and arms strong to work, was genius, against which there was every possible obstacle placed, that it should not be able to do itself justice. Cowper did not begin to write till he was over fifty; Burns was done with poetry, and all things earthly, at thirty-seven. The one was a mild and feminine nature, without passion or any fleshly impulse; the other a strong and headlong being made up of them. It is strange to note how they worked together in absolute unconsciousness of their joint mission. It is difficult even to realise that the "Task" was published only two years before that volume of varied and desultory verse which raised the Ayrshire ploughman at once to the rank of poet, not in his own district or country alone, but for the world. We will not ask which of the two was the greatest wonder; though, indeed, in our own mind we have little doubt on the subject, and cannot but feel that a fresh, new, and impassioned spirit was the natural fountain from which new life might be expected to spring. Burns was free by nature of all bondage of models or rules. If any preceding poet could be said to be his master, it was such a homely and unpretending oracle as Allan Ramsay, who died the year before he was born. If the transmigration of souls were a tenable faith, it would be a pleasant superstition to believe that the

simple and genial writer of the "Gentle Shepherd" had been permitted to come back again after his bookselling and all his little activities, and to learn what it cost to be a great poet, in the body—so unlike his—of that only rustic who has ever reached the highest rank in poetry. He and a certain foolish young Robert Ferguson, of whom nobody would have known anything had not Burns taken his memory into a kind of worship—and the ballads and old songs that are in the air of every Scotch countryside—were all the literature Burns was born to. Afterwards, when he struggled, with that heavenly yet not always profitable thirst which used to be characteristic of the Scotch peasant, into some acquaintance with general literature, his mind had already taken its form; and almost everything that was dictated by what his contemporaries thought to be better taste, has been condemned by the judgment of posterity. With a new life to elucidate, and all the primary passions and impulses of humanity to furnish him with poetic themes, he was far better off in his ignorance than the cultivated critics who patronised him afterwards, and made allowances for his rusticity. He was at the fountainhead of life, and had nothing in him to obscure that vividness of sight which is the poet's first qualification. That he used a form of language which had not followed the laws of progress, and was no longer the language of the well-bred and cultured classes, was a more serious drawback; but that language, again, has its felicities as well as its disadvantages, and was infinitely better for Burns, as remaining still national, than if he had been born in Yorkshire or Lancashire. In short, so far as his birth and training went, Burns, we believe, had a better beginning than, for the purpose he was to serve in the history of his race, he could have had elsewhere.

If it were not a necessity of civilisation that greatness

should involve social elevation, and that the poet should be supposed to fail in life if his genius does not bring him into the society of the higher classes, there would be no more occasion for regretting the birth of a poet in a labourer's cottage than there is for regretting the birth of a statesman in a duke's castle. But it is hopeless to think of persuading either the great writer himself, or the world, that his rising in poetry ought not to involve "rising in life." This was the grand curse of Burns's existence. It was a rise in life for him when the jovial attorneys and doctors of the little Ayrshire town invited him to join in their booses and their controversies. It was high advancement to gain an entrance to the houses of the rural gentry; and when he came the length of Edinburgh, its professors, and its dinner-parties, what better paradise remained for the ploughman? But none of these fine things were for the advantage either of his art or of himself. His early patrons enlisted his genius in miserable personal vulgarities of abuse which that genius has pitifully preserved to this day, to the dismay of all wholesome minds; and his fine Edinburgh friends wanted him to write a tragedy, and to abandon his familiar tongue for the stilted traditions of the poetry of the period. These are dangers from which, in their worst aspect, a man is spared by being born a gentleman; and they were far more hard upon Burns, and more detrimental to his welfare, than any other disadvantage of his origin.

Robert Burns was born the son of two hard-working country people; small farmers, yet not much above the condition of farm-labourers; very poor, proudly upright, and independent. His father, a man of the lofty and somewhat stern character which Scotland is credited with, maintained a desperate conflict with poverty till the end of his life, and never did more than keep the wolf from the door. In external circumstances they were scarcely

better off than the villagers whose claim for Christmas coals and blankets is one of the chartered rights of English country life; but in mind they were as haughty as the Doges, holding charity as poison and debt as shame. This virtue of independence was the one only point in the family character that threatened to grow morbid. It affected the manners and ways of thinking of the poet in after years in a way which did him much harm, and embittered his feelings, at once to those who served, and those who neglected him; but this was certainly a failing which leant to virtue's side. Never was there a more attractive picture than that of this peasant household amid the ceaseless care and privations of their life. Their first little farm was sterile and profitless; the second promised better, but there, too, ill-luck overtook them in the shape of a doubtful lease and hard-hearted factor. The boys had to set to work as soon as their young strength permitted, and Robert had begun to do a man's work by the time he was fifteen. He and his brother Gilbert were sent to school as occasion served, for a few years regularly, and then, as they grew older, "week and week about," as they could be spared from the farm work. When there was no possibility of schooling, "my father," says Gilbert Burns, "undertook to teach us arithmetic in the winter evenings by candle-light; and in this way my two elder sisters received all their education." The kindly mother moved but and ben while the fireside lessons were going on, and sang them songs in the gloaming; and a certain old Jenny, brimful of ghost stories and all the ballads of the countryside, frightened and charmed the children with her endless lore. In this way, besides the breathing sweetness of the homely music, that floating literature of simple song, full of story, full of sentiment, becomes familiar to many a rustic who is penetrated by it while scarcely knowing it to be poetry. Burns had

thus the training of a complete system of rustic sentiment, philosophy, and humanity before his mind had come in contact with printed literature at all. The songs of the countryside were his A B C. In these lowly regions there was no idea that "the words" were an unimportant part of the performance—that they were not, indeed, the song itself, however essential it might be to have "a bonnie tune." We do not know if there has been any change in this respect among Scotch peasants; but it would not have been difficult to find in former days men and women both, whose heads were full of these songs, though they could not sing a note; and this would seem to have been Burns's case. The untaught continuous strain, mostly of love and of its woes, though with all kinds of simple variations, from the profound pathos of "Waly-waly"—

"Oh Martinmas wind! when wilt thou blaw,  
And shake the dead leaves frae the tree?  
Oh gentle death! when wilt thou come,  
And tak' a life that wearies me?"

to the long-drawn rustic farce of "Get up and bar the door"—was almost the only sound of gaiety in the serious house. "Nothing could be more retired than our manner of living (the narrative continues); we rarely saw anybody but the members of our own family. . . . My father was for some time almost the only companion we had. He conversed familiarly on all subjects with us, as if we had been men, and was at great pains while we accompanied him in the labours of the farm, to lead the conversation to such subjects as might tend to increase our knowledge or confirm us in virtuous habits. He borrowed Salmon's *Geographical Grammar* for us, and endeavoured to make us acquainted with the situation and history of the different countries in the world, while from a book society in Ayr he procured for us the reading

of Durham's *Physics and Astro-theology* and Ray's *Wisdom of God in Creation*, to give us some idea of astronomy and natural history. Robert read all these books with an avidity and industry scarcely to be equalled."

Imagine the ploughboys in their winter evenings gathered about the solitary candle on the table, or smoky little oil-lamp, with those sober treatises before them, reading "with avidity," while the cheerful glow of the fire lighted up the one homely room which was kitchen and parlour and hall, and the mother's quick cheerful coming and going, and her songs, not loud enough to disturb them, gave a lively, kindly background to the little group—work over, supper preparing, warmth and rest about them. It would not have been half so picturesque, and probably there might not have been the same strain after better things, had William Burness's cottage been the laird's house; there tutors and governors would have had all the responsibility; here the serious toil-worn peasant, already growing old, helping his boys to acquire a little information on solid subjects such as commended themselves to his sober spirit, brings in an element of far higher interest. After all, one wonders whether the mother's songs did not do more for at least one of the lads than Salmon's *Geographical Grammar*. But who was to know that?

These peaceful evening scenes were often painfully interrupted. Sometimes threatening letters would come from the factor—letters threatening roup (auction) and jail, the two horrors of the poor—which "used to set us all in tears;" no separation of interests here, or division between the elder and younger, but that perfect union which made the family one. Sometimes there would be a rare visitor to interrupt the studies. On one distinct occasion, of which a record exists, the young dominie who had taught the boys spent an evening in the smoky

cheerful farm-kitchen. He brought with him of all things in the world the tragedy of "Titus Andronicus," "and by way of passing the evening he began to read the play aloud. We were all attention for some time, till presently the whole party were dissolved in tears. A female in the play" (says Gilbert Burns) "had her hands chopped off (I have but a confused remembrance of it), and then was insultingly desired to call for water to wash her hands. At this, in an agony of distress, we with one voice desired he would read no more. My father observed that if we would not hear it out, it would be needless to leave it with us. Robert replied, that if it was left he would burn it." Most likely the young dominic considered the raw head and bloody bones business (which surely Shakspeare had nothing to do with) would be the right kind of excitement for the farmer's children; but the future poet was a bold critic in the indignant purity of his young imagination. Is there not something in these scenes, over which the mind lingers more tenderly than if this boy's education had been in the hands of the most learned scholars? And when the books were laid aside, and the porridge eaten, and the homely yet hospitable table cleared, came the family service, the "Let us worship God," which, in the confidential intercourse between the brothers, Robert told Gilbert had always seemed to him the most solemn of utterances. A sketch of family life more pure, more true, or more touching, was never made.

But this existence, though so beautiful to look back upon, was a very hard one. "The cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing moil of a galley-slave," the poet himself says—with an exaggeration which rarely comes into his poetry, but is scarcely ever absent from his prose—looking back upon that struggle when he seemed to have reached the heights of fame, and probably hoped



to have escaped poverty for ever. His brother is more moderate, but still with a deep gravity relates the story of their laborious youth. "To the buffetings of misfortune," he says, "we could only oppose hard labour and the most rigid economy. We lived very sparingly. For several years butchers' meat was a stranger in the house, while all the members of the family exerted themselves to the utmost of their strength, and even beyond it, in the labours of the farm. My brother at the age of thirteen assisted in threshing the crops of corn, and at fifteen was the principal labourer on the farm, for we had no hired servant, male or female. The anguish of mind that we felt at our tender years under these straits and difficulties was great. To think of our father now growing old (for he was above fifty), broken down with the long-continued fatigues of his life, with a wife and five other children, and in a declining state of circumstances—these reflections produced in my brother's mind and mine sensations of the deepest distress." But nevertheless the lads were young and capable of throwing off their "deep distress" whenever the factor's letter or some other immediate pinch of misery was a few days, or perhaps a few hours off. At fifteen Robert fell in love for the first time with "a bonnie sweet sonsie lass," who was his partner in the harvest-field, following him closely along the golden rig, as the manner was, binding as he cut the rustling poppy-mingled grain. She "sang sweetly" a song composed by a small country laird's son on one of his father's maids, with whom he was in love—and the dark sunburnt glowing boy, with the thrill of a new emotion stirring through him, ran into song too, moved by emulation, and by all those dawning "thoughts, and passions, and delights," which are the ministers of love. "My Nelly's looks are blythe and sweet," sang the fifteen-year-old boy in his rapture in the golden autumn

sunshine among the golden corn. He is not much to be pitied after all. The scene is Arcadian in its tender innocence, lit up with a sweet glow of natural light and colour, but no heat of premature or unnatural passion. The little scene in the harvest-field balances with its sweet daylight, its first love and first song, the Rembrandt interior of the farm-house kitchen and its copy-books. "Puirtith cauld," such as "wrecks the heart," and labours without ceasing—but at the same time warm, natural, hopeful life, and poetry and love: a prince could not have more.

We need not linger upon the little literature which he added after the days of the Geographical Grammar to so many better things. He read Addison and Pope in addition to the serious works chosen by his father. His boyish imagination was much stirred by the "Vision of Mirza," and his literary ambition aroused by the accidental possession of "a small collection of letters by the most eminent writers"—an unfortunate acquisition, if they had any share in forming his own style in correspondence, which was always bad, pompous, and affected. And he began the Latin "Rudiments," and acquired, by book, a little French—all very fine things for a ploughboy to aspire to, though of little advantage to him. What is much more important, however, than this, and other little attempts at self-improvement, reading-clubs, night-schools, and educational efforts of various kinds—things very fine to hear of in the case of an ordinary peasant lad, but very unfruitful when the peasant is a Burns—he lived his toilsome life in innocence, in close companionship with his excellent brother Gilbert, and in loyal devotion to his home. His early poems are full of the delightful compensations which God and poetry gave him for his premature toil. When he looked back upon his youth in after years, in prose, in the pompous retrospect of a letter

to some fine person, with whom the poet was minded to show himself equally fine, he speaks gloomily and even bitterly of that toil: but never in verse—never in the happy unconscious utterances of his youth.

“ I mind it weel in early date,  
When I was beardless, young, and blate,  
An’ first could thresh the barn ;  
Or haud a yokin’ at the plough,  
An’ tho’ forfoughten sair enow,  
Yet unco proud to learn.”

What better representation could be given of youthful progress than this of the “ happy weary ” boy, “ sair forfoughten,” but proud and glad of his advance to his heritage, a man’s work? “ He is hardly to be envied,” says Mr. Lockhart, “ who can contemplate without emotion this exquisite picture of young nature and young genius.” And even when he grew older and fell into those habits of Scottish country life, which unfortunately so often lead to mischief, there is no deterioration visible in the young poet for some time. He “ went ower the hills to Nannie,” though the wastlin’ wind blew both rude and chill, and the day’s darg had been long and heavy; and no corrupt heart could have written words of such honest and noble simplicity as those that tell the story of those pilgrimages—

“ Our auld gudeman delights to view  
His sheep an’ kye thrive bonnie, O ;  
But I’m as blythe that hauds his pleugh,  
Au’ has nae care but Nannie, O.

“ A country lad is my degree,  
An’ few there be that ken me, O ;  
But what care I how few they be,  
I’m welcome aye to Nannie, O.”

Never was a more manly song. And the other love songs of this youthful period all strike the same true note of

sentiment, refined and exquisite in their homeliness, as if they had been the wooings of a prince—

“ Yestreen, when, to the trembling string,  
The dance gaed thro’ the lighted ha’,  
To thee my fancy took its wing,  
I sat, but neither heard nor saw :  
Tho’ this was fair, and that was braw,  
And yon the toast of a’ the town,  
I sigh’d, and said among them a’.  
Ye are na Mary Morison.”

Could there be a more delicate expression of that supremacy of one, which is too penetrating, too ethereal, to mean merely a Judgment of Paris, a selection of the most beautiful? Far beyond that ignoble conflict goes our ploughboy; sweet though they all are, they are not Mary Morison—and his heart has no more to say; an inspiration which the most diligent study of classical models or other means of culture could never have given. Among the Mauchline lads and lasses, dancing wild reels with many a snap of the fingers and rustic shout, who taught him this highest delicacy of passion? Even when the sentiment is less exquisite it is always manly and honest. Principal Shairp laments the country custom of nightly meetings at doors or windows, meetings for which the rustic lover will walk miles over hill and dale after his day’s work, and which the milkmaids and serving lasses calculate upon as others do upon the joys of society, as the chief relaxation of their lives. No good comes of these nightly trysts to many, and probably little good came to Burns; but as he sets forth on “the Lammas night,” when—

“ The sky was bide, the wind was still,  
The moon was shining clearly,”

to watch the barley rigs with Annie: or when he invites another “charmer” on a clear evening, when “thick flies

the skimming swallow," to stray with him upon his "gladsome way," and to note the beauty of the autumn landscape—

"The rustling corn, the fruited thorn,  
And every happy creature,"

it is hard to think of any possible harm. Every one of these bursts of song reveals to us the sweet countryside with all its woods and streams, the tender silence of nature, the "happy living things," which the poet loves with all the genial warmth of a nature which is in friendship and harmony with everything God has made. The lark which

"Twixt bright and dark,  
Blythe waukens by the daisy's side,"

is as near to him as the shepherd that "o'er the moorland whistles shrill"—and all nature is populous to his universal sympathy. A man with such exuberance of tender thought and winning words was, as might be expected, welcome everywhere to the rustic maidens, to whom it was as sweet as to any princess to receive such tuneful homage. No woman at that day, in any language (unless it were the Kätchens and Friederikas, by whom Goethe was educating himself to all the varieties of emotion, in the depths of Germany), had such exquisite homage offered to her as had Mary Morison, whoever she may have been: and it is a curious thing to realise that, in all the English-speaking races, there was not one but *this Ayrshire rustic to whom that mystery of pure and perfect feeling was revealed.*

The medicine of this fresh and simple nature was what sick poetry wanted to restore the noblest of the arts. It was obtained here at the very fountainhead. As the great world rolls slowly one surface after another to the shining of the sun, so when a new creator arises

a whole new earth comes gradually into sight before the eyes of the astonished lookers on. The native sphere of Burns was so unknown, that though his mission, like that of Cowper's, was more to reveal than to invent, yet the surprise of the new country discovered was to the rest of mankind like that of a creation. A few rural voices had indeed made the air tingle here and there, producing upon the world around an effect not much unlike that which might have followed had the sheep opened their mouths to emit couplets instead of bleatings; but rare prodigies of this kind had generally proved to have little more to say than might have come from the sheep. But Burns came, like Homer, from the very fountainhead of life: nobody had taught him a note, he had his music from nature, and he took his theme from nature. He was as little afraid of the homeliest facts of his landscape as Cowper was, and as observant of every change of the atmosphere; but the principle which Cowper applied only to the external country Burns employed for the inner man, reproducing all that was in him with a dauntless freedom more remarkable still. And Burns was so much the greater poet, and had in him such a sweep and rush of inspiration, as well as such a superior force of life, and all the added impetuosity of passion, that his advent was far more startling and effective than that of his gentler fellow. One wonders if they had ever met what would have been their mutual impressions? Would Burns have set down the mild recluse as one of the unco good, or Cowper stigmatised his brother as a rural rake? Nothing could be more likely; and yet in his heart there was nothing that so touched the one as true religion, and nothing that more attracted the other than the life and vigour in which he was himself so deficient. They were both equally withdrawn, though in ways so different, from the excitements and emulations

of literary coteries. Silence surrounded them in their walks, though the middle-aged Englishman's was but an invalid's stroll by the flat river side, or over the tranquil fields—while the young ploughman “walked in glory and in joy, following his plough along the mountain side;” but they were equal rebels to the world and all its conventional ways.

The poet's education was thus conducted with ideal fitness, until he attained the age of twenty-three—an age at which a young man in his rank is often a husband and a father; for hard work and early independence are very maturing influences. And so long as he kept in his natural rustic sphere, with all its roughnesses and privations, its evening trysts, and miscellaneous love-making, no fault, it would seem, could be found with him. He worked early and late, and had many anxieties. He kept free of debt (which he always held in horror) upon £7 a year. As they worked at the farm-work he would communicate one poem after another to Gilbert, who is in his way as great a wonder as the poet himself, to those who do not understand what a poor Scotch countryman might be. One of the productions thus communicated was the “Epistle to Davie,” which we may accept as the young ploughman's theory and philosophy of life as he saw it:

“What tho' like commoners of air,  
We wander out, we know not where,  
But<sup>1</sup> either house or hall?  
Yet nature's charms, the hills and woods,  
The sweeping vales, and foaming floods  
Are free alike to all.  
In days when daisies deck the ground,  
And blackbirds whistle clear,  
With honest joy our hearts will bound  
To see the coming year;

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<sup>1</sup> Without.

On braes, when we please, then,  
 We'll sit an' sowth a tune ;  
 Syne rhyme till't, we'll time till't,  
 And sing't when we hae done.

" Then let us cheerfu' acquiesce ;  
 Nor make our scanty pleasures less,  
 By pining at our state ;  
 And, even should misfortunes come,  
 I, here wha sit, hae met wi' some,  
 An's thankfu' for them yet.  
 They gie the wit of age to youth ;  
 ' They let us ken oursel' :  
 They make us see the naked truth,  
 The real guid and ill.  
 Tho' losses, and crosses,  
 Be lessons right severe,  
 There's wit there, ye'll get there,  
 Ye'll find nae other where."

These verses were repeated by Robert to Gilbert in the summer of 1784, shortly after their father's death, when they were working together at Mossgiel, the new farm in which each member of the family had embarked all that he and she had, or could do, in the hope of being able to live and toil together. It was "in the interval of harder labour, when he and I were working in the garden (kailyard). I believe," adds Gilbert, "the first idea of Robert's becoming an author was started on this occasion." As they worked among the kail, the one said to the other that the verses were good, as good as Allan Ramsay—sweetest praise to the author's ears! and that "they would bear being printed." The writer and receiver of the rhymed epistle were both country lads, like the critic; and these were the sentiments which naturally occurred to them, and the style that pleased them. It was at Mossgiel that he first inscribed himself, in some moment of triumph, upon the books in which he copied out his verses, "Robert Burns, Poet," and this was



the "auld clay biggin'" where, as he sat and eyed the smoke that filled the air with a "mottie misty" haze, the vision of Coila, blushing "sweet like modest worth," with her "wildly witty rustic grace," and her eyes which "beamed keen with honour," "stepped ben," stopping the rash vow he was about to make to rhyme no more.

And during the two years they here laboured together, doing badly, yet by no fault of theirs, Gilbert remembered, with proud and tender faithfulness, other days and places in which communications of a similar kind were made to him. Once when the two were "going together with carts for coal to the family (and I could yet point out the particular spot), the author first repeated to me the 'Address to the Deil.'" Another poem he heard "as I was holding the plough and he was letting the water off the field beside me." The "Cottar's Saturday Night" was repeated to him on a Sunday afternoon walk, one of the few moments of leisure in their laborious life, and Gilbert was "electrified," as well he might be. During these years Burns was working not less but more hard than an ordinary ploughman, fighting desperately to keep his position as a farmer, however poor, rather than become another farmer's hired-servant, which was the only alternative; and in the midst of his toils, unknown, with Gilbert for his audience, poured forth a torrent of poetry as sweet and fresh and wholesome as the country breezes. This was not a deluge of love-songs only, as we are disposed to believe. Among these early productions were pictures of Scottish life such as no man had dreamed of before, and which lit up all Scotland with an illumination of tender light; soft outbursts of humour, genial poetic laughter—and mingled with these such friendly rural philosophies, such pathetic thoughtfulness, pity and charity, as go direct to the heart. Every influence around him entered into his soul. Its

door stood open night and day to receive everything that was weak and wanted succour, to admit everything that was lovely and noble. In all the world there was not a created thing which he shut out from his sympathy, from the "cowering timorous beastie" in the fields to "Auld Nickieben" in "yon lowin heugh," which he was "wae to think upon," even for the sake of the father of evil. He is like a god in his tender thoughtfulness, his yearning for the welfare of all. When he wakes by night and hears the storm shake the walls of the clay cottage, he does not hug himself in his individual warmth and comfort, or even draw close the curtains, and trim the fire, like the other poet, on the banks of the Ouse, but cannot get to sleep again for thinking of the creatures out-of-doors :

"List'ning, the doors an' winnocks rattle,  
I thought me on the ourie cattle,  
Or silly sheep, wha bide this brattle  
O' winter war ;  
And thro' the drift, deep-lairing sprattle,  
Beneath a scaur.

"Ilk happing bird, wee helpless thing,  
That, in the merry months of spring  
Delighted me to hear thee sing,  
What comes o' thee ?  
Where wilt thou cower thy chattering wing,  
An' close thy e'e ?"

Who could have supposed that of all places in the world a fellow-feeling so exquisite, so delicate, so tender, was waking under the roof of a clay cottage, and thinking, like heaven itself, of the humblest things—the sparrows that do not fall to the ground without our Father ? Cowper was the gentlest of men, making pets even of hares, and turning with loathing from him who would crush a worm ; but it is not to his sensitive spirit that

the darkness opens, and the silly sheep and the helpless birds show themselves in the dreary midnight, unfortunate brothers for whom his heart bleeds. If it had been but for this one revelation, that recording angel of whom we have heard so much might have blotted out a thousand peccadilloes. "He prayeth best that loveth best all things, both great and small."

But at this period there were few offences with which to reproach the young poet. He had taken no ill turn as yet in his rustic career. So far as we can see, his country life was even marked with aspirations towards pleasures more elevated than the ordinary round of fairs and midnight courtships. He and Gilbert and five others established a club for "literary purposes" in their village. There was no place to hold its meetings save the public-house, but the expenditure of each member was limited to threepence, to avoid evil consequences. Their object was "to relax themselves after toil, to promote sociability and friendship, and to improve the mind." The little Tarbolton club debated the question whether prudence or inclination should be most considered in marriage, and other sentimental and social subjects. They "found themselves so happy" that when the club had existed a year they gave a dance in its honour; that is, they met together, each one with the partner of his choice, "and spent the evening in such innocence and merriment, such cheerfulness and good humour, that every brother will long remember it with pleasure and delight." If we did not know, alas! the darker shadows that always haunt the rural life of Scotland, this narrative would read like *Arcadia*. When the brothers removed to Mossgiel, near Mauchline, they originated a similar club there, with which Dr. Currie finds fault on the strange ground that the books chosen by the little society were "less calculated to increase the knowledge than to refine the

taste." Imagine taste existing at all or any refinement in a ploughman's club in a Scotch village a hundred years ago! And we talk of progress in these days! But Burns was not destined to remain in this humble society. As his reputation grew, and his early poems became known, people much above his own condition in life began to hear of the moorland poet, and he fell into the hands of his betters, in an evil hour.

The little town of Mauchline would seem to have possessed, as most country towns did, and still do, perhaps, with a difference, a jovial society, not very scrupulous or very refined, but full of a kind of rude wit and boisterous good-fellowship, according to the fashion of the time. The high jinks of Scott's lawyers give us a sketch of this kind of wild and witty company at its best; but even that, if touched by any hand less than a master's, and dealing with any class less remarkable than the wits of the Parliament House, might easily bear a very different aspect. In a little country town, at a period when manners were coarser and license greater than at present, the jovial coterie was almost without restraint. The women were used to the absorption of the men in toddy and talk all the evening through, and the minister in many cases shared both—unless he happened to be one of those unreasonable Puritans of the New Light, who objected to everything that was comfortable, and at whom they laughed with furious jokes and merriment till the roof rang. The only leaven of this society, the salt that kept it from corruption, was its genuine humour and appreciation of everything comical, and a rude energy and boisterous fun that was in it. The heavy country wits, with snuff lying in the wrinkles of their long waistcoats, and an atmosphere of whisky breathing round them, had yet an eye for a joke, and took a grim pleasure in watching the follies of their neighbours

They were men sometimes of good birth and connections, allied to the neighbouring gentry, and proud of their connection, though familiar, as the Scottish code of manners has always permitted, with all classes, and having their joke wherever they went. The "writer," who probably was the younger son of some neighbouring laird, the doctor, the factor of the nearest duke or marquis, any idle man with enough to live upon, belonged to this noisy coterie. Mr. Skelton, in his recent sketch of the "Year One," describes it in his little town as consisting of the provost, the lawyer, the captain of the coastguard, and the minister, the latter no less daring in jest, if a little more careful in conduct, than the others. They were ready to give a jocose patronage to religion when this was the case; but when a zealous minister, calling them to account for their peccadilloes, occupied the parish, then the very air rang with the guffaws of their defiance and ridicule.

The first social elevation that Burns obtained was, when he was admitted into the company of these choice spirits. A man who could sing a good song (especially if he had made it before singing it), or produce a lively play of hazardous jokes, or add a spice of novelty of any kind to their vigorous coarse talk, was sure of a welcome among them. Burns no doubt believed devoutly that he was being elevated to the best society when he was taken up by the Aikens and Hamiltons; and when he found nothing better than the gossip of a clique, and the cleverness of local malice, disappointment, if at all events perhaps an easier sense of familiarity, must have been in his mind. But it was no doubt a gratification to him to be made a member of the clique, and initiated into its personal hatreds and jocular malignities, till at last, in his genuine yet fictitious enthusiasm of good fellowship, he lifted the clear voice, given him for purposes so much

more noble, to sing to the confusion of his patrons' adversaries, adding sharp darts of his own to their vulgar gibes and coarse badinage. This is the evident reason why it happened that the young poet, till that time the truest new revelation of poetic genius within the limits of Britain, nay, in the universe itself (with the exception of young Goethe in Frankfort), opened his public career—he who had so much fine and tender and humorous poetry in his old scrap-books at home—with a string of verses in which bad taste and profane meaning had not even wit or power to justify, or the headlong race of poetic excitement to excuse them. This was what the patronage of his betters did for him. From the “Epistle to Davie” to the “Twa Herds,” what an inconceivable downfall! the first full of all the tranquil breadth of nature, the sober yet ever pleasant and cheerful light of morning, before misfortune had any bitterness, or individual passion or anguish had disturbed the confidence of youth in its own fate; the other a miserable local squib, requiring pages of explanation, filled with strange names of persons we know nothing about, bristling with allusions which never could have possessed any zest or flavour, save to those who were acquainted with the temporary and unlovely squabbles of the countryside. A more terrible satire could not have been than the probably quite unconscious one which the young poet implied in the care he took to suit his style to his audience—to rustic Davie and Gilbert those manly views of life and labour which would not misbecome a philosopher; to the wits of Mauchline the servility of a rude personal attack. Burns did not intend any such blighting comparison, but the reader is justified in making it when he sees the debasement of this Samson making sport for the Philistines. It could not be helped. The nearest aristocracy, such as it was, was bound to notice the local poet. Would that

they had let him alone in the better atmosphere into which he was born! but by this time he had already begun to stumble out of that good and pure atmosphere, into dark ways—leading to those precipices from which no precautions taken by others can divert the footsteps of wayward men.

It is wonderful, however, to realise how many of Burns's finest productions were written at this period. Even in the objectionable vein thus opened, there were triumphs to be obtained. Two or three others as objectionable, and with as few redeeming qualities as the "Twa Herds"—the "Kirk's Alarm," and "The Ordination," followed—exactly the kind of verses which would naturally be produced by the coarse and clever poet of a village—the man whose personal satires are always received by his limited circle with "a roar of applause." But we think Principal Shairp and other grave critics are mistaken when they class together all Burns's attacks upon the unco good. "Holy Willie's Prayer" is a very different production from the others. It is equally, or indeed, more profane; but it is the highest kind of satire, awful in its vivid reality, a condensed and terrible picture which outdoes Tartuffe. The Hypocrite, a figure which all the poets cannot extirpate from the world, but which is their legitimate prey wherever it is found, stands out before us in a blaze of infernal light. We are not sure even that we can regret the profane suggestion which turned the poet's eye upon such a personification of evil. This tremendous sketch wants no explanatory notes, no disguise of forgotten initials; the Mauchline coterie, with many a peal of delighted laughter, might identify the victim, as the French critics did also in Molière's day; but it does not add to our terror or awe, to know that he had a living prototype and an ordinary name; and no virtuous prejudice, however natural, can be permitted to

interfere with the immortality of such a poem. In all his maturer years, when his mind might be supposed to have more affinity with the tragic aspects of existence, Burns never again struck so strong and true a note.

But everything he touched in this youthful heyday of his powers was full of vigour. It would be natural to suppose that these were the days of the love songs, and that the humour and the thought came later. But this is not the case. The best of the songs came, indeed, out of the fulness of his too susceptible heart in this period ; but he had a mind also for other things. What a varied and inexhaustible storehouse must that have been, out of which, side by side with "Holy Willie," came the most perfect of homely idylls, "The Cottar's Saturday Night," and, on the other hand, the "Address to the Deil," with its ripe and humorous philosophy and tender-heartedness. Milton dignified his Satan into one of the grandest of heroes : but no man was ever "wae to think upon you den" before this young ploughman. And what martial poet ever produced a figure more daring and splendid than that of the soldier whom this ploughman paints for us in lines of fire, in the ode which he consecrates, alas ! to Scotch Drink, the most fatal of all the ills of Scotland—

"But bring a Scotsman frae his hill,  
Clap in his cheek a Highland gill,  
Say, such is royal George's will,  
An' there's the foe,  
He has nae thought but how to kill  
Twa at a blow.

"Nae cauld, faint-hearted doubtings tease him ;  
Death comes, wi' fearless eyes he sees him ;  
Wi' bluidy hand a welcome gies him ;  
An' when he fa's,  
His latest draught o' breathin' lea'es him  
In faint huzzas."

Was there ever a more brilliant animated living



picture? The "Highland gill," after all, has very little to do with it; but he whom no faint-hearted doubtings assail—whose rush of fervid valour is limited only by the thought how best to kill "twa at a blow," who breathes out in the face of death his faint huzzas—what a vision, rapid as the lightning, plucked out of the very heart of battle!

And does not the reader see how, as these poems grew and breathed into being, the veil of the unknown was lifted, and Lowland Scotland, sweet and cheerful, came to light as when the sun rises over an undiscovered land? Some one, we forget who, has directed attention lately to the place Scotland held in the estimation of her rich and scornful yoke-fellow, before Burns and Scott were. Even Smollett, a Scotsman, dared say very little for his country. It was a land of sour fanatics, of penurious misers, of mean bowing and scraping, and servile arts of all kinds; a country which all its sons forsook as soon as possible, to fish and scrape a living out of English prodigality, and to promote their raw-boned countrymen over the honest Saxon, who was no match for their grovelling cunning. This was the best that was said for us on the other side of the Tweed. The extraordinary revolution of sentiment since (though still the old prejudice has left some unaccountable relics) is due entirely to the two poets, whose mission it was to make their country known. Burns was the first, and in some respects he was the greatest. His revelation was deeper, stronger, more original, and reached lower down—revealing almost more than a mere nationality in the warm and tender light by which he made Scotland visible: for he made the poor visible at the same time, the common people, the universal basis of society—not as objects of pity, which was the tendency of those pictures of Cowper's to which we have already referred, but as

brethren, with the same faculties, the same enjoyments—and sometimes more beautiful and sacred enjoyments than many of their betters. Hard must that man's heart have been and opaque his intellect who, after reading the "Cottar's Saturday Night," could have looked with disdainful eyes upon any cottage: Scotland was the first object of the revelation—but after Scotland, mankind.

All this astonishing work was done before he was twenty-seven, while he was working early and late, living the life of a farm labourer, though he was his own master, and with no advantages so called, either in the shape of general culture or acquaintance with the best models. For our own part we are not sure that Burns's reputation would have been much lessened had he never written another line. Critics acquainted with the best models have given each other a sign to glorify the "Jolly Beggars" and "Tam o' Shanter:" but no one who loves Burns and understands him will turn, we think, by preference, or direct any new reader to these later productions. He will rather glean out of the wealth of this marvellous youth, through which the poet passed in many a toil and trouble, yet, "in glory and in joy," following his plough. Alas, towards the end even of this prolific and wonderful season the glory and the joy lessened, and shame and sorrow came the poet's way. He began his downward career, in the manner always too facile to his countrymen. We do not need to repeat here the most distasteful story of the preliminary transactions between him and his future wife, or the marriage irregularly made, then broken, or supposed to be broken, notwithstanding all our deeply rooted terror of Scotch marriages—the father of Jean Armour preferring shame for her to the penniless, and it is to be feared, inconstant and unruly husband upon whom she had a legitimate claim. Recent investigators have been so cruel as to

make it apparent that the story of "Highland Mary" occurred in one of the lulls of the twice broken and twice renewed connection with Jean, so that the purity and sorrow of that tale—the well-known Sunday which Mary and her lover spent together on the banks of Ayr, swearing everlasting truth over the running water, with that Bible held between them, in which Burns had written the divine injunction to "perform thine oath;" and the still sadder wintry moonlight, in which he addressed his "Mary in Heaven"—lose something of their mournful tenderness; and we are forced to conclude that probably it was a good thing for Highland Mary that death stepped in, and that all she could ever claim was that pathetic recollection. The poor little moorland farm was a failure, not from any fault of the brothers, and the countryside would seem to have turned against the rural Lothario, who already had appeared more than once on "the stool of repentance" and received public admonition to little purpose. Even his Mauchline friends were estranged from him, one of them at least, it appears, agreeing with Jean Armour's father that it would be rash to put a woman's happiness in his hands. Burns's sky, a little while before so clear, seems all at once to have been covered with overwhelming storm-clouds. Nemesis works very rapidly with the poor: in this respect there is nothing that makes so much difference in life as wealth. The rich have time to sow their wild oats, but to the poor man the process cannot last long.

The poet was altogether overwhelmed by these sudden combinations of evil. No doubt it was bitter beyond expression to him to have no backing of social sympathy and support, and the humiliation of being abandoned by his sweetheart (who was more than a sweetheart, by this time the mother of twin children), the bitter thought that shame was better than himself in the estimation of her

family, and the grieved disapproval of his own—seem to have “worked like madness in his brain.” He was ready to throw up the conflict altogether, to go to the West Indies and make a new beginning on a Jamaica estate, which probably, had he been any other ruined young prodigal in the country, would have been the very best thing he could do. But to make this new start money was necessary, and to get even so much money as would pay his passage was a difficult matter. In this strait, some one suggested the publication of the poetry which was kept in the drawer of a deal table, in the garret, which was his bedroom and study, at Mossiel. Thus the greatest poetry of the age got to light, so to speak, accidentally, to assist the poet in banishing himself and retrieving his miserable fortunes far from the country he loved. A curious air of chance and caprice is thus thrown over the kindred events, happening within a couple of years, which meant so much for English literature. The “Task,” the invalid’s amusement, playfully undertaken to please “the fair,” was printed in 1784. The date of Burns’s downfall, and of the sudden necessity for money to pay his passage to Jamaica, was a little later: in 1786, out of the humble printing-press at Kilmarnock, in an edition of six hundred copies, and with a subscription of three hundred and fifty, his poetry appeared, nobody concerned thinking of much more than a local popularity, the applause of the people who spoke his own rustic language and knew every bank and brae which he had celebrated in his verse.

And for a little while this seems to have been all it attained. What should we know now, with all our additional facilities of communication, of a little volume of poems modestly published at Kilmarnock? Natural curiosity, anxiety, and hope kept him lingering to see

what would happen before he went away. He got twenty pounds as his share of the profits—more than enough for his passage-money—and the fame of the little book “spread like wildfire” in the countryside. One or two local magnates sought his acquaintance; among them Dugald Stewart, who was temporarily resident in the neighbourhood, and Mrs. Dunlop of Dunlop, one of the county aristocracy. He was pleased, no doubt: but still took his steerage passage to Jamaica, and sent off his chest to Greenock. It was on a gloomy autumn night that he left the manse of Loudoun, where he had gone to take leave of the minister, Dr. Lawrie, a friend who was even then exerting himself busily, but secretly, on the poet’s behalf: and gloomier still were his confused and melancholy thoughts. As he strode over the dreary moorland in the gathering darkness, hope forsook the young man thus “abandoned, exiled, and forlorn.” “Farewell!” he said, with all the bitterness of the parting swelling over him—

“Farewell! old Coila’s hills and dales,  
Her heathly moors and winding vales,  
The scenes where wretched fancy roves,  
Pursuing past unhappy loves,  
Farewell! my friends, farewell, my foes,  
My peace with these, my love with those—  
The bursting tears my heart declare,  
Farewell! the bonnie banks of Ayr.”

This was the very darkest moment before the dawn. He had scarcely gone from Loudoun manse when a letter arrived there from Dr. Blacklock in Edinburgh, a letter which the kind minister had been hoping for, which seems to have raised Burns at once from the depths of despondency to immediate and brilliant hope. “It was therefore much to be wished, for the sake of the young man,” said the blind man of letters, after much praise of the volume

his correspondent had sent to him, "that a second edition, more numerous than the former, could immediately be printed, as it appears certain that its intrinsic merits, and the exertions of the author's friends, might give it a more universal circulation than anything of the kind which has been printed within my memory." This was enough to change the aspect of heaven and earth to Burns; one of the special griefs in the combinations of distress that threatened to crush him having been the refusal of his Ayrshire publisher to run the risk of a second issue. Instead of going to Jamaica, he went to Edinburgh accordingly to push his fortune, with all the natural elation which such a change, and the prospect at last of real fame and success, naturally involved. Still, it will be perceived that it was for "the sake of the young man himself" that Blacklock counselled this step, hoping for a "more universal circulation than *anything of the kind*" had received. It would have seemed the wildest nonsense to the literary circles in Edinburgh to suppose that this young prodigy of a ploughman could one way or other affect literature, or that his second edition was of importance in any interest but his own.

We will leave to a separate chapter our sketch of the literary society of Edinburgh as then flourishing. The attitude of Burns in respect to it is very curious and interesting. Here was a young peasant, without education, without knowledge of the world, full of Scotch reserve and that *farouche* pride of the rustic which reaches the height of a passion. The pride which is supposed to accompany blue blood and great descent has justifications outside of the individual possessed by it; and in most cases it imposes a certain restraint upon that individual, and demands of him some qualities, or at least some graces, in accordance with it. But the pride of a peasant

is wildly personal, and independent of every consideration. The more he is conscious of his deficiencies even, the more wildly bent he will be upon attentions and observances due in society only to high social qualifications. From the moment when Burns steps into the light in Edinburgh, this mixture of shyness, inordinate self-opinion, and an almost polemical determination to prove himself the equal, if not the superior of everybody round him, appears both in his behaviour and in the private records of his opinions. It was no doubt a very difficult position. Uncultured, unaccustomed to the ways of society, knowing nobody, feeling himself a kind of vague representative, not only of genius but of man, among a curious crowd of superiors, all more or less disposed to infringe these rights, to patronise him, and lessen his own sense of dignity, he appears on the defensive, always watchful lest some affront should be intended; beguiled indeed, into better moods in the warmth of social intercourse, but ever ready to take fire again, and to resent not only imaginary slights to himself, but even the civilities offered to others whom he thinks less worthy.

“The rank is but the guinea stamp.  
A man’s a man for a’ that.”

is a very fine sentiment, but it is extremely troublesome when carried into society. It says much for the kind impressionableness of Burns’s real nature, that, strolling about as he did, wrapped in this mantle of rustic haughtiness, more all-enveloping than the pride of kings, he did after all unbend sufficiently to attract as well as to dazzle the curious Edinburgh society, especially the ladies, whom he “carried off their feet,” according to the characteristic Scotticism used by one of them, with his eloquence, his old-world deference and chivalry. This was quite in keeping with his character. Notwithstanding all his

rustic adventures, it is evident that a certain chivalrous feeling towards women existed in him always, and the gentle condescension of a lady not only pleases the poetic imagination as fancifully right and becoming, but had nothing unpalatable in it to so manly a man. He is said to have made the remark, that whereas he had met in his own class with men as excellent, as thoughtful, and high-minded, as any he had encountered in these higher circles, yet that an accomplished woman was a being altogether new to him.

But while he owned this spell, being always too ready to yield to feminine fascinations—which is perhaps the most certain of all means of being liked by women—his general aspect was not so attractive. He entered Edinburgh shy and proud, yet full of expectations, in the end of November 1786, and instead of taking a lodging more appropriate, went to a “close” in the Lawnmarket where a Mauchline lad, Richmond by name, lived, and shared his room and his bed for the greater part of his stay, thus clinging to his friends and his natural condition, in the midst of so many changes, with a tenacity which has at least as much obstinate pride as tenderness in it. “I tremble,” he says in one of his letters, “lest I should be ruined by being dragged too suddenly into the glare of polite and learned observation.” This was only a fortnight after his arrival, but by that time he had a list of acquaintances which shows how ready his welcome had been. “I have been introduced to a good many of the noblesse, but my avowed patrons and patronesses are the Duchess of Gordon, the Countess of Glencairn, with my Lord, and Lady Betty, the Dean of Faculty, Sir John Whitefoord; I have likewise warm friends among the literati, Professors Stewart, Blair, and Mr. Mackenzie, the ‘Man of Feeling.’” The latter, a sort of miniature Scotch Addison, enjoying a very great reputation in his



day, had reviewed Burns's early volume in the *Lounger*, a little periodical of the order of the *Rambler* and its many descendants, and this set him fully afloat in the knowledge of the world; for the paper is referred to by Cowper, and was widely read even in England.

Perhaps it was the fear of having his head turned by this sudden blaze of popularity which made Burns enter society with such a determination to hold his own. But granting this, there seems to have been little to find fault with in his demeanour. "In no part of his manner was there the slightest affectation," one of the bystanders tells us, "nor could a stranger have suspected from anything in his behaviour or conversation that he had been for some months the favourite of all the fashionable circles. In conversation he was powerful. His conceptions and expressions were of corresponding vigour, and on all subjects were as remote as possible from commonplaces. Though somewhat authoritative, it was in a way which gave little offence, and was readily imputed to his inexperience in those modes of smoothing dissent and softening assertion, which are important characteristics of polished manners." Dugald Stewart adds, "The attentions he received from all ranks would have turned any head but his own. I cannot say that I perceived any unfavourable effect they left upon his mind. He retained the same simplicity which had struck me so forcibly when first I saw him in the country, nor did he seem to feel any additional self-importance from the number and rank of his new acquaintance. . . . The remarks he made on the characters of men were shrewd and pointed, though frequently inclining too much to sarcasm. His praises of those he loved were sometimes indiscriminate and exaggerated. . . . His wit was ready and always impressed with the marks of a vigorous understanding, but to my taste, not often pleasing or happy."

This was the impression he made on Edinburgh—that of a man fully aware of his own rights, and disdaining to show any excitement of complacency or elation at the notice taken of him. When he “furnished the greater part of the conversation,” he did no more than what he saw evidently was expected of him; and appeared to society a wonderful phenomenon altogether, using language as good as the best, keeping his self-possession, setting vanity sternly at bay, upheld by the keenest inspiration of pride. There is nothing in his life more remarkable or more characteristic. His friends seem to have written to him on all sides, warning him against that intoxication of popular favour which has injured so many. To all he replies in the same tone, “I am willing to believe that my abilities deserve some notice. . . . I have studied myself, and know what ground I occupy, and however a friend or the world may differ from me in that particular, I stand for my own opinion in silent resolve, with all the tenaciousness of property. When,” he adds with a grandiloquence not so remarkable then as now, “When proud fortune’s ebbing tide recedes, you will bear me witness that when my bubble of fame was at the highest, I stood unintoxicated, with the inebriating cup in my hand, looking forward with rueful resolve to the hastening time when the blow of Calumny shall dash it to the ground with all the eagerness of vengeful triumph!”

This anticipation recurs continually in his letters—whether with that conscious attempt to propitiate fate by foreseeing the worst, which is one of the expedients of natural superstition, or in real soberness of expectation, it is difficult to tell. “You are dazzled by newspaper accounts and distant reports,” he says to another correspondent; “but in reality I have no great temptation to be intoxicated with the cup of prosperity. Novelty may

attract the attention of mankind awhile; to it I owe my present *éclat*, but I see the time not far distant when the popular tide which has borne me to a height of which I am perhaps unworthy, shall recede with silent celerity and leave me a barren waste of sand, to descend at my leisure to my former station." All this is wise to a painful degree, but it is not so altogether discouraging as the occasional outbursts of bitterness which are to be found in the still more private repository of his thoughts.

"There are few of the sore evils under the sun give me more uneasiness and chagrin than the comparison how a man of genius, nay, of avowed worth, is received everywhere, with the reception which a mere ordinary character, decorated with the trappings and futile distinctions of fortune meets. I imagine a man of abilities, his breast glowing with honest pride, conscious that men are born equal, still giving honour to whom honour is due. He meets at a great man's table a Lord Something or a Squire Somebody. He knows the noble landlord at heart gives the bard, or whatever he is, a share of his good wishes, beyond perhaps any one at table; yet how will it mortify him to see a fellow whose abilities would scarcely have made an eightpenny tailor, and whose heart is not worth three farthings, meet with attention and notice that are withheld from the sons of genius and poverty. The noble Glencairn has wounded me to the soul here, because I dearly esteem, respect, and love him. He showed so much attention, engrossing attention, one day to the only blockhead at table, that I was within half a point of throwing down my gage of contemptuous defiance."

This was the painful way in which the poet had the misfortune to contemplate that conventional standard of rank, which to more reasonable minds simplifies the regulations of society, and by making an entirely arbitrary rule, covers all the conflicts of *amour propre*, and invidious personal comparison. But, unfortunately, self-comparison was the rule of his life in this chapter of it. His peasant breeding did him no harm in his poetry, but it harmed him personally here, more than we can estimate, setting him entirely wrong in his relations to his

fellows. With an extraordinary bravado of cynical sentiment, all the more extraordinary since it is ostensibly intended for no eye but his own, he begins a diary, in which he promises himself to "sketch every character that any way strikes me, to the best of my power, with unshrinking justice." "I think," he adds, "a lock and key security at least equal to the bosom of any friend whatever." This was his unhappy mind in April of the following year, after three months' experience of Edinburgh: but what his experience was in full, it is better, perhaps, not to inquire too closely. The repression to which he subjected himself among his fine friends, naturally demanded some outlet on the other side, and this was not difficult to find. Men who, though inferior to his new patrons, were yet much above his natural level of society, men on a par, perhaps, with the Mauchline wits who had given him his first step of social elevation and moral debasement, held their doors open to him with a riotous welcome. He made up to himself among these jovial friends for the restraints of the more pretentious circles. Two of them who survived in his regard and became his correspondents afterwards, were masters in the High School; but the profession of a schoolmaster was not a certificate of character in those days, nor has it, strangely enough, ever been held in so much respect north of the Tweed, in the home of popular education, as in the other part of the island.

Burns left Edinburgh in May 1787. A letter of thanks to Dr. Blair for his kindness and hospitality has been preserved with the reply to it. Dr. Blair is very kind and even approving. "Your situation, as you say, was indeed very singular," he allows, "and in being brought out all at once from the shades of deepest misery to so great a share of public notice and observation, you had to stand a severe trial. I am happy that you have

stood it so well ;” but he gives the poet small encouragement to count upon his further acquaintance. “When you return, if you come this way, I will be happy to see you, and to know concerning your future plans of life ;” he says—not a very warm invitation. Dr. Blair, too, is dishearteningly ready to allow that the brief day of glory is over. “You are now, I presume, to retire to a more private walk of life. . . . As you very properly hint yourself, you are not to be surprised if in your rural retreat you do not find yourself surrounded with that glare of notice and applause which has shone upon you,” he says. It was all over, the lamps extinguished, the audience gone ; he himself had settled that it would be so, and he had no right to grumble if his friends assented ; and as a matter of fact, it is evident that they did assent.

In the midst of these painful indications of the jangling of the chords which had been so melodious, we may quote one or two pleasanter points in this brief Edinburgh career. “He walked with me in spring,” Dugald Stewart writes, “early in the morning to the Braid Hills, when he charmed me still more by his private conversation, than he had ever done in company ;” that is, Burns was once more himself in the free air, among the genial influences of nature, and in the society of one gentle spirit, not at that moment assuming the offensive guise of a patron. “He was passionately fond of the beauties of nature, and he once told me when I was admiring a distant prospect, in one of our many walks, that the sight of so many smoking cottages gave a pleasure to his mind which none could understand, who had not witnessed, like himself, the happiness and worth which they contained.” This comes to us with a sense of relief and happy return to nature and truth, for which we are truly grateful. And here is another little picture, simple as a vignette, which shows us how the poet

appeared in the eyes of a lame shy boy seated in a corner of one of the Edinburgh drawing-rooms, blushing yet happy in the out-of-the-way knowledge which endless reading had given him. Burns had admired certain verses attached to an engraving: "He asked whose the lines were, and it chanced that nobody but myself remembered that they occur in a half-forgotten poem of Langhorne's, called by the unpromising title of the 'Justice of Peace.' I whispered my information to a friend present, who repeated it to Burns, who rewarded me with a look and word which, though of mere civility, I received with great pleasure. . . . There was a strong expression of sense and shrewdness in all his lineaments; the eye alone, I think, indicated the poetical character and temperament. It was large and of a dark cast, which glowed (I say literally glowed) when he spoke with feeling or interest. I never saw such another eye in a human head." This is the description given by Walter Scott, then fifteen years old, of his contemporary of twenty-seven, which was all the age Burns had as yet attained.

• Among the many advices which were given to the poet at this moment, which was the turning-point in his career, there were several which suggested a closer application to poetry as the future occupation of his life. "Your lordship," he writes, "touches the darling chord of my heart, when you advise me to fire my muse at Scottish story and Scottish scenes." To Mrs. Dunlop, a kinder and more deeply interested counsellor, he repeats almost the same words. "Scottish scenes and Scottish story are the themes I could wish to sing. I have no dearer aim than to have 'it in my power, unplagued by the routine of business, for which heaven knows I am unfit enough, to make leisurely pilgrimages through Caledonia; to sit on the fields of her battles; to wander

on the romantic banks of her rivers ; and to muse by the stately towers or venerable ruins, over the honoured abodes of her heroes.

“But these are all Utopian thoughts. I have dallied long enough with life ; it is time now to be in earnest ; I have a fond, an aged mother to care for ; and some other bosom ties perhaps equally tender. . . . I guess that I shall clear between two and three hundred pounds by my authorship : with that sum I intend, so far as I may be said to have any intention, to return to my old acquaintance, the plough, and if I can meet with a lease by which I can live, to commence farmer. I do not intend to gixe up poetry ; being bred to labour secures an independence, and the Muses are my chief, sometimes have been my only enjoyment. If my practice second my resolution, I shall have powerfully at heart the serious business of life ; but while following my plough or building up my stacks, I shall cast a leisure glance to that dear, that only feature of my character which gave me the notice of my country.”

He had been advised to write a tragedy ; to give up his themes of common life and turn his attention towards more elevated subjects ; to abandon his Scotch dialect, “Why should you, by using *that*, limit the number of your admirers to those who understand the Scottish, when you can extend it to all persons of taste who understand the English language ?” he is asked.

“In my opinion” (the speaker is Dr. Moore, the father of Sir John Moore, the author of *Zeluco*, and many other books, in his day a man of some literary reputation), “you should plan some larger work than any you have as yet attempted. I mean, reflect upon some proper subject, and arrange the plan of it in your mind without beginning to execute any part of it till you have studied most of the best English poets, and read a little more of history. The Greek and Roman stories you can read in some abridgment, and soon become master of the most brilliant facts, which must highly delight a poetical mind. You *should* also, and very soon *may*, become master of the heathen myt'ology, to which there are everlasting allusions in all the poets, and which is in itself charningly fanciful. What will require to be studied with more attention is modern history, that is, the history of France and Great Britain from the beginning of Henry the Seventh's reign. I know very

well you have a mind capable of attaining knowledge by a shorter process than is commonly used, and I am certain you are capable of making a better use of it, when attained, than is generally done."

This was the approved recipe for making a man of letters in those days. Thus cultivated, what doubt that a tragedy, a series of didactic poems, or any other special performance that might strike the fashion of the day, could be produced at pleasure? To Burns, who knew that he was already a poet, and had attained what none of these sage advisers could reach to, it may be supposed that this advice was by no means welcome. The authorities treated him as a beginner, one who had still his reputation to make. "Take time and leisure to improve your talents, for on any second production you give the world, your *fate as a poet will very much depend*," says Dr. Blair—as genial critics say now to a young novelist who has produced the first three volumes, which are to be the precursors of a hundred. Burns does not seem to have returned any distinct reply. "I have the advice of some very judicious friends among the literati here, but with these I sometimes find it necessary to claim the privilege of thinking for myself," he says to Mrs. Dunlop, when he informs her that it is his intention to return to "his old acquaintance the plough." And it is to the immortal credit of Burns's good sense that he never appears to have thought of taking up poetry as a trade. To roam about the country and study Scotch scenes and historical incidents for the purpose of writing poems about them for the market, never seems to have entered into his head. He had thought for some time of the Excise, which seems to have been a service somehow attractive to men who had otherwise failed in life, or who had no opening to more lucrative work about this period. A gauger has never been a popular character, yet, for some reason or other, young Scotchmen, desirous to make a step



out of the class of artizans or small tradesmen, seem to have regarded it with favourable eyes, perhaps because it required little previous training, and still involved a spice of adventure. And Burns does not seem to have considered that there was anything derogatory in it. That, or a farm, perhaps both together, the one supplementing the other—but not the struggles of a poor author, or an artificial trade of poetical manufactures. These were the days of Grub Street, when young writers went up to London with a few pounds in their pockets and a bundle of MSS., and flung themselves on the world blindly with the intention of living by what they called “the Muse.” This is evidently what many of his patrons expected from Burns, and, we repeat, it is the greatest credit to him that he never thought of adopting such an occupation.

But all these recommendations, and the moderate friendliness which assured him, “if you are passing this way,” that “I shall be happy to see you,” and the mortified consciousness that this brilliant moment in his life was over, and that nothing remained, did not tend to increase his happiness. He made two expeditions—one into the Highlands, the other to the south of Scotland, with companions of, as appears, no elevating order, and with a bitterness in his heart that found vent in foolish cynicism, and sometimes in reproaches addressed to the great and rich, and anticipations of “illiberal abuse, and perhaps contemptuous neglect.” But yet, wherever he went, he was received with honour and enthusiasm. A bitter and jealous fellow-traveller, who could not understand why Burns should be better received than himself, no doubt helped to exaggerate his uncomfortable frame of mind. The two dealt defiance round them, wrote rebellious verses on inn windows, and angry epigrams, and got very little enjoyment out of their journey. At one house he just missed Mr. Dundas, the dispenser of

Scottish patronage at the time ; and at another, Mr. Addington, afterwards Prime Minister, was expected, both of whom might have been of use to the poet—but in both cases the jealous temper of his travelling companion hurried him away. Mr. Addington, however, furnishes a whimsical addition to the history at this point. He had been invited to meet Burns, of whose poetry he was a great admirer, and not coming, sent a sonnet in his place, complimenting the “pride of Scotia’s favoured plains,” and recommending to him a philosophical superiority to fate, in lines which would be cruel if they were not so ludicrous—

“What though each morning sees thee rise to toil,  
Though Plenty on thy cot no blessing showers,  
Yet Independence cheers thee with her smile,  
And Fancy strews thy moorland with her flowers ;  
And dost thou blame the impartial will of heaven,  
Untaught of life the good and ill to seem ;  
To thee the Muse’s choicest wreath is given,  
To thee the genuine dignity of man.  
Then to the want of worldly gear resigned,  
Be grateful for the wealth of thy exhaustless mind.”

• Mr. Addington’s mind was evidently not “exhaustless” like the poet’s, whom he congratulates, in the way of verse, and probably Burns, if put to it, would have preferred his own estate to that of the writer of these heartless lines. “Depart in peace, be ye warmed and fed,” was never said with more callous cynicism. Cowper, who was in no special need, got a pension of three hundred a year a little while later. What would not that, or the half of it, have been to Burns ! But at all events he need not have been congratulated upon a poverty which it was so easy to relieve. Such compliments bear a wonderful resemblance to insults.

He returned to Edinburgh in the following autumn : but his day was over. Though he remained there five or

six months, he seems to have seen no more fine company. He was perhaps more at home on the lower level, which yet was a higher level than that upon which he was born. It was during this time that he indulged in the sentimental flirtation which produced his letters to Clarinda, a foolish episode in a not very wise life. There was a great deal of nonsense, no doubt, both written and said; but then love-letters are always nonsense to impartial lookers on, and the general style of composition was very different then from now. Burns was always somewhat high-flown, partly from his natural temper, partly from his peasant breeding; but there can be little doubt that there was genuine passion as well as a great deal of artificial sentiment in this strange chapter of his life. The man who wrote—

“Had we never loved so kindly,  
Had we never loved so blindly,  
Never met and never parted,  
We had ne’er been broken-hearted,”

must have meant what he said. But then he had the faculty, not exclusively possessed by poets, of being quite sincere and quite impassioned in two cases at the same time.

He left Edinburgh finally in the beginning of 1788, having passed two winters there, one of them in the full heyday of popularity, the other in the cold shade. With Burns, as with most other people, the permanent tenor of circumstances prevailed, and after the moment of triumph he had to fall back upon his natural friends. That these natural friends were men of some education, ought to have been a gain to him; that it was not so was probably due to the very principle that brought them together, a love of the coarsest convivial pleasures. He speaks somewhere, in a moment of sober sadness, of

“that savage hospitality which kicks a man down with strong liquors.” Still it would be hard to blame the jovial schoolmasters for the waste of possibility and character which his second winter in Edinburgh seems to have involved. In all such miserable concatenations of circumstance we are too apt to blame the secondary personages involved, the “bad company” which “leads away” the individual in whom we are interested. But this is poor philosophy. No man is led away whose will is against going, and it is fit that each should bear his own burden. His poetry had produced him a little fortune of about (the authorities agree in saying) £500, of which he gave £180 to his brother Gilbert to enable him to go on with his farm, and apparently to form a sort of provision for their mother. This money, “the consolation of a few solid guineas,” seems to have been all his Edinburgh experiences brought him. But for this “I could almost lament,” he says, “the time that a momentary acquaintance with wealth and splendour put me so much out of conceit with the sworn companions of my road through life, insignificance and poverty.” There can be little doubt that a sense of failure and downfall, and bitter perception that his social success was momentary, and that no real change had happened in his life, was in his mind ever after. And he had derived no advantage to counterbalance this from the advices and comments of those elegant critics who were supposed to be the dispensers of fame. It is curious, indeed, to observe the similarity of his experience and that of Cowper in respect to the criticisms and emendations to which their poetry was subject. At one of the country houses which Burns visited after his Edinburgh sojourn, he was asked “whether the Edinburgh literati had mended his poems by their criticisms.” “Sir,” said he, “these gentlemen remind me of some spinners in my

country, who spin their thread so fine that it is neither fit for webst nor woof." The reader will be amused by comparing with this epigrammatic summary of the criticism of the period Cowper's protest against it. It is needless to recall to him how unlike the two men and their works were; but in this respect they are at one. Cowper's much more decided and lengthy expression of indignation was called forth by an impertinence, the alteration of a line in his "Homer," by "some accidental reviser of the manuscript."

"I did not write the line that has been tampered with hastily or without due attention to the construction of it, and what appeared to me its only merit is in its present state entirely annihilated. I know that the ears of modern verse-writers are delicate to an excess, and their readers are troubled with the same squeamishness as themselves, so that if a line does not run as smooth as quicksilver they are offended. A critic of the present day serves a poem as a cook serves a dead turkey, when she fastens the legs of it to a post and draws out all the sinews. For this we may thank Pope; but unless we could imitate him in the closeness and compactness of his expression, as well as in the smoothness of his numbers, we had better drop the imitation, which serves no other purpose than to emasculate and weaken all we write. Give me a manly rough line, with a deal of meaning in it, rather than a whole poem full of musical periods that have nothing but their oily smoothness to recommend them.

"I have said thus much because I have just finished a much longer poem than the last, which our common friend will receive by the same messenger that has the charge of this letter. In that poem there are many lines which an ear so nice as the gentleman's who made the above-mentioned alteration would undoubtedly condemn, and yet (if I may be permitted to say it) they cannot be made smoother without being the worse for it. There is a roughness on the plum which nobody that understands fruit would rub off, though the plum would be much more polished without it. But, lest I tire you, I will only add that I wish you to guard me from all such meddling, assuring you that I always write as smoothly as I can; but that I never did, never will, sacrifice the spirit or sense of a passage to the sound of it."

Thus the two great revolutionaries made their protest

The one, with wonderful spirit and vigour for so gentle a man, in words; the other with a laugh, a *mot* only, but a sturdy disregard of all the criticisms of this kind to which he was subjected, and all the counsels founded upon these criticisms, which is more telling than verbal remonstrance. Before we quit this subject, we may note, what is a very pleasant fact to meet with, that Cowper and Burns, though they never met, had at least encountered each other in the spirit, in their poems, and with mutual understanding and appreciation. "I have read Burns's poems," Cowper writes to his friend Mr. Rose, who seems to have sent them to him, "and have read them twice; and though they be written in a language that is new to me, and many of them on subjects much inferior to the author's ability, I think them on the whole a very extraordinary production. He is, I believe, the only poet these kingdoms have produced in a low rank of life since Shakspeare (I should rather say since Prior), who need not be indebted for any part of his praise to a charitable consideration of his origin and the disadvantages under which he has laboured.' It will be a pity if he should not hereafter divest himself of barbarism, and content himself with writing pure English, in which he appears perfectly qualified to excel."

This last objection was of course entirely reasonable from Cowper's point of view, though impracticable from that of Burns; but the compliment paid to him is as high as any one could desire. Burns, on the other hand, generally carried Cowper's "Task" in his pocket, and "took it out when he found himself in a lonely road, or in a brewhouse, where he had to wait sometimes to 'gauge the browst.' He enriched the margins of the copy he used with notes critical and commendatory, and from the number of the marks and the frequency of the praise, it appears that the English bard was a great

favourite." "Is not the 'Task' a glorious poem?" he says to Mrs. Dunlop. "The religion of the 'Task,' bating a few scraps of Calvinistic divinity, is the religion of God and Nature, the religion that exalts, that ennobles man."

It is scarcely necessary for our purpose to dwell on the after-part of Burns's life in detail. He returned to Ayrshire after the disappointments of Edinburgh, and married his bonnie Jean—an act for which he apologised anxiously to all his correspondents, but to which he seems to have been bound in honour and also in love: for he loved her at least as well as any of the other objects of his roving affections. To speculate upon the influence that a wife of higher class and stronger principle might have had upon him is entirely vain. The instances are very few in which a good wife, or anything else, has had power enough to turn a man from dissipation when it has got full hold of him; and he was still a ploughman, full of the pride, the brag, the defiance which, far more than natural roughness of manners, disgust and repel the more delicately bred. He would probably have broken the woman's heart who had been dazzled by his poetry and eloquence, and liked his home not more but less for her superiority. There can, we think, be little doubt indeed, however injurious to a woman's pride it may be to say it, that a cultivated wife, or one who shares his intellectual interests, is by no means necessary to the happiness of a man of genius. The old-fashioned institution of a good, simple, worshipping woman, tolerant and uncritical, is perhaps better for him—or, at least, he is pretty sure to think so: an opinion in which the great mass of men who have no genius will agree. Burns, after his marriage, settled at Ellisland, near Dumfries; a beautiful situation, but, it is said, indifferent land. "You have chosen like a poet, not like a farmer," some one is reported to have said to him; yet he must, one would suppose, have been

able to judge, and he carefully records the opinion of an old farmer whom he took with him to inspect the place. It turned out badly, however, whether because the land was bad, or the farmer's mind not sufficiently given to it; and he applied to be appointed to active service in the Excise, his commission for which had been given him some time before. It was an occupation which involved much moving about, and a considerable amount of adventure, and would not seem to have been unpleasing to him. One of the incidents of his life, which led to a very foolish act and some trouble, will show the exciting character of the work at this stormy period. "A suspicious-looking brig" appeared in the Solway, and Burns and his fellow-officers boarded and took her, an exploit which must have set the poet's pulses in motion. He bought the guns with which the vessel was furnished, and sent them "with a letter to the French Legislative Assembly, requesting them to accept the present as a mark of his admiration and sympathy." Robert Burns, poet, to the French nation! The braggadocio was sublime; but an occupation in which such little incidents occurred could not be altogether disagreeable to a nature craving excitement.

Of course, this foolish offering was stopped, and the sender got into trouble enough to oblige him to write an almost abject letter to Mr. Graham of Fintry, appealing to him as a husband and father to save him from dismissal. This is a very sad production; and to hear him describing the accusations against him as "the dark insinuations of hellish groundless envy," is not less sad. The wild excitement raised by the French Revolution excuses, no doubt, a great deal of this folly; and we cannot be surprised that Burns, with his bitter sense of his own failure to keep his footing among the great (strangest of all contradictions of the theory of equality—for why



should he have cared more about the society of dukes and duchesses if they were no better than ploughmen and milkmaids?), should have felt with double force the fire of the excitement which turned the wisest heads. But there is something which wounds us in the feverish and ostentatious folly of revolutionary sympathy, conjoined with the equally feverish hysterical protest of "devout attachment" to the British Constitution, when his conduct was called in question. No doubt it was "thae moving things ca'd wife and weans" which prompted his alarm; but we should be glad to have heard less of them in such conjunctures.

Before this last stage, however, three years had passed at the farm of Ellisland, in which much poetry was written. He had engaged heart and soul in the collection of songs for Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum* before he left Edinburgh. Some years later he took the same warm and eager interest in a similar collection set on foot by Thomson. For these two publications he wrote a large number of songs of differing degrees of merit, for which he proudly refused all remuneration. Two purely poetical scenes, of which his wife gives an account, instances of the way in which his subject possessed him, as well as, in one case, of the profound emotion out of which utterance came, are to be found in the story of this later period. In the beginning of the October of 1789, Burns had been very merry. He had written "Willie brew'd a peck o' maut," of which Principal Shairp, with somewhat comic gravity, says, "If bacchanalian songs are to be written at all, this certainly must be pronounced 'the king amang them a';" but as the month drew near a melancholy anniversary, the death of that Highland Mary whom we know so little of, and who had in reality so much less share in his life than many another, he was observed by his wife "to grow sad about something, and

to wander solitary on the banks of the Nith, and about his farmyard, in the extremest agitation of mind nearly the whole night. He screened himself on the lee-side of a corn-stack from the cutting edge of the night wind, and lingered till approaching dawn wiped out the stars one by one." When at last his anxious wife (who, let us hope, was not aware what anniversary it was) persuaded him to come in, he sat down and put upon paper his visionary sorrow, in verses so pathetic, that no critic has ever ventured to reckon them otherwise than among the most beautiful that Burns ever wrote:— .

"Thou lingering star, with less'ning ray,  
That lov'st to greet the early morn,  
Again thou usher'st in the day  
My Mary from my soul was torn.  
O Mary! dear departed shade!  
Where is thy place of blissful rest?  
Seest thou thy lover lowly laid?  
Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?"

It is of the nature of a poet, and even had he not been a poet, it was of the nature of Burns, to feel everything that affected him with as much fervour and force as if nothing had ever affected him before. The other side of his inspiration affords an equally characteristic scene. Burns had recommended to Captain Grose, the antiquary, to include old Alloway Kirk in the sketches he was making for publication. The visitor suggested that Burns should write a poem to accompany the sketch, and the seed fell into good ground.

"The poem"—we quote from Principal Shairp, who is the last to tell the tale—"was the work of one day, of which Mrs. Burns retained a vivid recollection. Her husband had spent the most part of the day by the river-side, and in the afternoon she joined him with her two children. He was busily engaged 'crooning to himself';

and Mrs. Burns, perceiving that her presence was an interruption, loitered behind with her little ones among the broom. Her attention was presently attracted by the strange and wild gesticulations of the bard, who was now seen at some distance. He was reciting very loud, and with tears rolling down his cheeks, the animated verses which he had just conceived:—

‘Now, Tam, O Tam! had thae been queans,  
A’ plump and strappin’ in their teens.’

“‘I wish ye had seen him,’ said his wife, ‘he was in such ecstasy that the tears were happing down his cheeks.’ . . . The poet having committed the verses to writing on the top of his sod-dyke above the water, came into the house and read them immediately in high triumph at the fireside.” In this sudden heat of impulse one of his greatest and most sustained efforts was produced. He had neither “thrown off barbarism,” nor prepared himself for the composition of something great by a study of all the best models, the stories of the Greek and Latin mythology, and the events of modern history, as his advisers had urged upon him. But here, in a moment, written on the top of his sod-dyke, and read hot from his glowing mind by his fireside half-an-hour after, came something which no critic could mend—which critics indeed, in the exercise of a wise discretion, have never attempted to do anything but praise.

Burns was about three years in Ellisland, and when he gave up this last unfortunate essay in farming, removed to Dumfries, and henceforth confined himself to his work of Excise officer. His whole life is recorded in brief sums of time. Two years here, three there, five in Dumfries, which was the last and saddest chapter of all. He had left all the little money his poems brought him in the cold soil of Ellisland, and henceforward had nothing

but his small salary as an Exciseman (fifty pounds a year, he repeatedly says ; seventy, we are told, when in active service) to live upon. For his songs he proudly refused to take any payment, and he appears to have been taken at his word by everybody concerned. No other edition of his collected works seems to have been called for, notwithstanding the universal enthusiasm they had called forth ; so that the five hundred pounds which he brought from Edinburgh represented all that his genius did for him in this way. And of that he got little good. Many a hard word has been said about the inferior post in which Scotland permitted her greatest poet to earn his children's bread and to die : but had his friends been steadfast enough to push him onward to a better grade, there was less harm than has been supposed in the Excise. This seems to have been his own ambition, and would have contented him fully ; but perhaps his foolish exuberances in the way of politics, his toasts instead of Pitt "to a better man George Washington," his present of guns to the French Convention, and other such unnecessary and undignified demonstrations of wounded pride and revolt, made his advancement impossible. There is little doubt that he was, as he says, "devoutly attached to the British Constitution," and as loyal as there was need to be. But he was an injured (he thought) and disappointed man, injured by being poor and a poet, and by the received fictions of social life, which made dukes and earls more great than he. It is impossible to doubt that he meant no more than this—and probably he would have said much less, but for the excitement of all those wild assemblies in which the rude wits of the countryside drew the poet out for their own entertainment, and led him by their applauses and incitements to wilder and wilder rashness of speech. The foolish epigrams and broken verses which were born of this period

(as well as many most beautiful and touching poems) are the mere poetic froth of a harassed and perturbed mind, and as such should be swept altogether out of recollection. It is not thus that we desire to take leave of Burns.

Fortunately he never attempted any tragedy, as his cultivated advisers had suggested : but it is said that he had thought of a subject for a drama, to be called "Rob M'Queechan's Elshin." This was to be founded upon a popular legend of Robert Bruce. That hero, according to the story, when defeated on the water of Cairn, had the heel of his boot loosened in his flight, and appealed to Robert M'Queechan to fix it—who to make sure ran his awl (or elshin) nine inches up the king's heel. This does not seem a very promising subject for a dramatic poem, and Burns fortunately never went farther than to mention the notion to his friends. His only attempt at dramatic composition was the "Jolly Beggars," about which a great many critics have expressed unbounded enthusiasm. We<sup>1</sup> are unable to join in these universal plaudits, and we believe that now-a-days few enthusiasts for Burns care to do more than repeat the conventional praises of this wild fragment. Its vigour is unquestionable, but there is little constructive power, and only the most primitive daubs of character. M. Taine considers it the *chef-d'œuvre* of the poet, and devotes several pages to the discussion of its sentiments and personages. "J'espère que voilà du style franc, et que le poete n'est pas petite bouche," he says; but these qualities by themselves, however valuable, do not make poetical merit.

<sup>1</sup> There must always be, we presume, however age and experience may modify nature, a certain inability on the part of a woman to appreciate the more riotous forms of mirth, and that robust freedom in morals which bolder minds admire. It is a disability which nothing can abolish, and we hasten to forestal criticism by avowing it. In such matters the reader will judge for himself how much our opinion is worth.

In this particular, vicious sentiment need not tell more than virtuous, in our opinion, and the confined atmosphere of "Poosie Nansie's," is to ourselves as much inferior in art as it is in wholesomeness to the country freshness which is Burns's true atmosphere. His great effort in narrative poetry, "Tam o' Shanter," is more worthy, we think, of the universal praise bestowed upon it, though we agree to a large extent in Mr. Carlyle's less elevated estimate. In neither of these poems is the heart appealed to at all, nor any but the lower faculties of the imagination. Tam indeed, lingering in the alehouse, putting off as long as possible his severance from its delights, but when once fairly started, retaining enough of the warmth within him to present a courageous, muddled, humorous front to fate, afraid of nothing,—

"Whiles holding fast his gude blue bonnet,  
Whiles crooning ower some auld Scots sonnet,"

is as luminous a picture as could be of the Scottish peasant as distinguished from others of his kind, with his touch of rude poetic possibility, and the lurking fun which is never altogether absent from his musings. Sancho Panza would have seen no vision in Alloway Kirk, though he would have been as reluctant to leave his inn, and would have carried as many bottles under his belt as any man. But we cannot pretend to be impressed by the witches' dance, even though Sir Walter Scott answers for it that "it is at once ludicrous and horrible." The horrible is the merest artifice, and we do not in reality care a straw for accessories so manifestly theatrical as the "coffins" standing "round like open presses," and the dissecting-room furniture on the tables; a comparison, for instance, with Goethe's weird assembly of the same kind will show at once the inferiority of the picture. Faust's backward retreat of terror and disgust

when he sees "a little red mouse" leap from the mouth of his pretty partner is such a touch of diabolical genius as Burns has no pretension to equal. But, on the other hand, Tam is entirely out of the possibilities of the great German. His round-eyed wonder, the warmth of the whisky in him, the humour of his muddle-headed spectatorship, not in the least impressed by this "horror," which the critics have discovered, is in its way unapproachable. We can imagine him laughing under his breath as he spurs the faithful Meg along the darkling road with all that wild train at his heels. In his tipsiness and pawky simplicity and sense of the real underneath the imaginative, he is never a bit afraid, nor does the poet represent him as being so. "Tam kend what was what fu' brawly," and cared no more for "Auld Nick in shape of beast" than Cuvier did. This we think entirely deprives the poem of that hold upon the imagination which the supernatural, seriously intended, ought always to possess. But Burns, who wrote it with tears of mirth "happing down his cheeks," meant nothing but fun, or we are greatly mistaken, and fully attained all the effect he aimed at.

Several of his most beautiful songs were the product of these last years, along with a great many others which were little worthy of his great name, and which it seems a pity to preserve at all. "John Anderson, my jo" is, however, fine enough for the severest critic. Many a glowing image of youthful love he has left us, the best of them as delicate and pure in their passion as ever lyrics were; and here the circle of fervid verse is completed by the most perfect utterance of old and faithful affection.

"John Anderson, my jo, John,  
We clamb the hill thegither;  
And mony a canty day, John,  
We've had wi' ane anither:

Now we maun totter down, John,  
But hand in hand we'll go,  
And sleep thegither at the foot,  
John Anderson, my jo."

The end of most lives is sad : either the speed of the current as it approaches the fall conveys a sense of tragic haste and desperation such as are inseparable from our ideas of a sudden ending, or the stagnation of old age waiting for its release, appals and chills our hearts. In either sense the concluding chapter is sad. In Burns's case it was doubly so : for the miserable feeling of a life thrown away and wasted, adds to the almost intolerable pang with which we see a man in the fulness of his powers swept along, dissatisfied, embittered, disappointed, out of the world, which he still might have been so capable of serving. Everything in those last years suggests the image of a wild torrent, flowing quicker every moment towards the precipice over which it must disappear in clouds of angry foam. He vindicated his better nature only by the wretchedness which overwhelmed him at every moment of thought, a wretchedness from which he was glad to escape into the continual excitement of dissipations quite unworthy of him. He had many excuses—his life of constant movement, riding over ten parishes, with now and then an encounter with smugglers, or such an adventure as that which made him master of the guns of the smugglers' brig—and the popularity he had attained among all the jovial spirits of the district—offered a hundred temptations. "From the castle to the cottage, every door flew open at his approach ; and the old system of hospitality then flourishing, rendered it difficult for the most soberly-inclined guest to rise from any man's board in the same trim that he sat down to it. The farmer, if Burns was seen passing, left his reapers and trotted by the side of Jenny Geddes (his mare) until he could per-



suade the bard that the day was hot enough to demand an extra libation. If he entered an inn at midnight, after all the inmates were in bed, the news of his arrival circulated from the cellar to the garret; and ere ten minutes had elapsed the landlord and all his guests were assembled round the ingle, the largest punch-bowl was produced, and

‘Be ours to-night—who knows what comes to-morrow?’

was the language of every eye in the circle that welcomed him. The highest gentry of the neighbourhood, when bent on special merriment, did not think the occasion complete unless the wit and eloquence of Burns were called in to enliven their carousals.”

This latter class failed him, however, at the end. We do not pretend to believe that there were any qualities in the Dumfriesshire gentry which would have made their notice an instrument of salvation to the poet; but so far as they were of use in keeping him to decorum they failed him at his greatest need. Not that this was to be wondered at. A man who, after dinner, was capable of insulting rudeness to a lady in her own drawing-room, was a dangerous acquaintance, and even his best friends shrank from the risk. And a man who openly committed himself by approval of revolutionary sentiments, by sympathy with rebels against the English crown, and adversaries to it, could scarcely hope for advancement in the Government service. Thus the clouds closed in around him, and there seemed no opening from whence succour would come.

He died at thirty-seven. Had he died ten years earlier his reputation would scarcely have been less, and he would have escaped a great deal of misery; but it is not for us to reckon with Providence. Even if we hesitate to accept Mr. Carlyle’s conclusion that he was the greatest man of

his generation, the one most fit to rule and command, we may nevertheless allow that he was by far the greatest poet. Cowper is placed beside him in the bead-roll because, so distant as they were from each other, they both helped—or rather, they wrought between them—the permanent enfranchisement of poetry, her right to see things as they were, and to express herself as she pleased, in whatsoever manner liked her, reserving her power to touch the innermost soul, whether she went back to lift the mantle of Milton, or picked up a homely medium of utterance on the roadside. No harp, no lute was longer necessary. We got rid of the antique attendance of “the Muse.” A new life and a new freedom came into the language, and the bondage of Pope, and precedent, and the best models, was loosed from the soul. Burns died in 1796—Cowper not till 1800. It would be hard to say which life was most tried, most unfortunate, most sad. Had either man—he who stormed his life out in mid-career, or he who drank out all the dregs of mournful age—known how to rule his own spirit, how different might have been the record! But Cowper had the excuse of mental disease: whereas no apology can be made for Burns, except that which pity makes for the victim of a defective will in all circumstances. This fatal deficiency equalises all human qualities, and makes the man of genius, alas! only a little more luckless, not better, than the veriest fool.

ROBERT BURNS, born 1759; died 1796.

Poems published in Kilmarnock, 1786.

2d Edition in Edinburgh,<sup>2</sup> with additions, 1787.

3d Edition, with Tam o' Shanter, etc., 1793.

4th     ”             ”             ”             1794.

Edition published after his death by Dr. Currie, with letters, 1800.

## CHAPTER. III.

## LITERATURE IN SCOTLAND BEFORE BURNS.

THE Edinburgh of Burns's day is a somewhat difficult study for the inquirer. It is represented by a number of notable persons, of whom there are, however, pictures so different that we scarcely know which to adopt. All the biographers of Burns represent him as seduced from the calm delights of a refined society, into the jovial undercurrent of tavern life, where third-rate men and vulgar joys swept him away out of a better career. And when we turn on one hand to the books and periodicals of the time, to the languishing periods of the "Man of Feeling," and the weak Addison-and-water of the *Mirror* and the *Lounger*, this view of the situation has a certain support. But on the other hand Sir Walter Scott, and later, Lord Cockburn in his *Recollections*, unfold before us a society so outspoken and so homely, so tolerant of the easier vices, so ready to forgive everything that had fun and spirit involved in it, that we are bewildered and cannot tell what to think. Could Nicol and Carmichael and the Crochallan Club, to which several of Burns's biographers attribute all his dissipations, have been more riotous and merry than that assembly, periodical and unchanging, in which Counsellor Pleydell was found at high jinks by Colonel Mannering? But then the "Man of Feeling" would have been as much out of place in such

an assembly as the grave English soldier himself, who did not know what to make of it. Henry Mackenzie, the author of this book, was the representative of Edinburgh at that moment in the field of *belles lettres*. He was a poet after his kind; he had written tragedies, he was the author of the sentimental romance of the period, and he was also its favourite critic and essayist. Most curious is the picture he presents to us. Never was Edinburgh more individual, never perhaps was she so jovial. The town was full of remarkable men, whose names were known all over the world—and of scarcely less remarkable women, whose *bon mots*, and whose daring opinions and ways, were known at least over all Edinburgh. Lord Cockburn affords half-a-dozen sketches of old ladies, old in his time, who must have been in full bloom in the days of Burns, whose strong and racy individuality it would be hard to match anywhere. A more racy or less mim-mouthered society could scarcely be.

Perhaps the circles into which Burns fell, among men upon whom the gravity of age had stolen, the Robertsons and Blairs, the gentle blind poet Blacklock, so fluent in verse, with his little band of pupils—and even Dugald Stewart himself, the most suave of professors, a man who was good and gentle by temperament, and in whose presence we feel sure no riot could have been possible—had more seriousness, if not more culture than belonged to the strong and gay, and somewhat reckless and cynical humour of the Scotch capital. The latter indeed is the least Scotch of all his learned contemporaries. It is evident that he held an imposing position in Edinburgh. To enter his class was, as Lord Cockburn tells us, “the great era in the progress of young men’s minds.” Latterly his house was filled with pupils from more courtly circles; English youths with great names and a great future, gazing with keen eyes and all the interest of

novelty at the wonderful little metropolis, where intellectual interests were the chief occupation of men. Dugald Stewart, however, is far more like the ideal of an Oxford tutor than a Scotch professor, and good Scotsman as he was, has little of the characteristic national flavour of the time. But Henry Mackenzie has no national character at all—and the impression of Edinburgh which he leaves upon the reader's mind is curiously false and artificial. It would answer for "the Bath" or "the Wells," or any centre of provincial fashion and self-exhibition. The *Mirror* and the *Lounger* afford us no glimpses either of those alarming old ladies who spoke out their minds with such daring frankness and such broad Scotch, like that fine moralist, a clergyman's widow, who, at eighty, hearing how a lady's good fame had suffered from a prince's indiscretion, shook her shrivelled fist and cried out, "The damned villain! does he kiss and tell?"—or of the witty lawyers, so little scrupulous in words, so keen and sharp of wit, respectful of no shams nor of much else—or even of the historians and philosophers who gave the town its seal of distinction. Those quaint and venerable figures in their old dining-rooms, or perambulating their favourite walk in the Meadows, under the shadow of old George Heriot's Hospital, never make the slightest appearance in the supposed accounts of contemporary manners, by which the *Lounger* hoped to claim a place beside the more famous weekly records of English society. All that we get from it is a misty glimpse of fashions and dissipations, like, though at a long distance, the society sketches of the *Spectator*, petty and provincial, and many times watered. Mackenzie was the first to give a really generous and discerning criticism of Burns, putting him at once in his right place as a poet, which is infinitely to his credit; but though he was the recognised exponent of literature and society at the time, he

gives us not a single indication of any society into which it could have been worth the ploughman's while to appear at all.

This curious deficiency is scarcely comprehensible, unless from the ambition Mackenzie had to spread his *Lounger* beyond Edinburgh, and the sense that Scotland was still a barbarous and unknown country to the larger minds of English readers. When we remember that he actually adds a *glossary* to the "Address to a Mouse," quoted in his article on Burns, as if that "good broad Scotch" which was spoken by so many of the best people in Edinburgh was unknown to the delicate ears of his hearers, we feel that elegant fiction can go no farther; it is as odd as any other affectation of the "*Precieuse*" period. "Even in Scotland the provincial dialect which Ramsay and he (Burns) have used is now read with a difficulty which greatly damps the pleasure of the reader," he says. The natural result from this is that Mackenzie's sketches, professedly of Scotland, are as little like Scotland as they are like Germany. They are of no country under the sun. They are of that vague typical region invented by Aldison, which is filled by examples of all the virtues and vices, and where a perpetual crusade against the fashion and its vagaries is the chief spur of existence. Marjory Mushroom comes to town; she has her head turned with new dresses and high *têtes* and feathers, is persuaded to paint, and meets a great many tempters to folly in the shape of fine ladies and fine gentlemen—and coming home again is wretched, and fills the heads of all the Misses Homespun with illegitimate longings. Or Mrs. Careful describes how, occupied like Virtue's self in teaching her little girls, she is interrupted by innumerable callers, who spoil her morning. Or it is the story of Eudocius and Clitander which edifies the reader; or Colonel Caustic, who is a weak imitation of Sir Roger

de Coverley, represents chivalry and all the Graces, with a great many indignant and sarcastic remarks upon the inferiority of everything in the present to everything in the past. An Addison of Tunbridge Wells, doing all he can to ignore the fact that his assemblies and plays are not the real resorts of fashion, but yet with no more difference in his tone than the heavier atmosphere of Kent necessitated, might have written just such moralities. Here and there, with a breath of regret, he owns, indeed, that Edinburgh as a fashionable centre is not the chief of cities. "There is a sort of classic privilege in the very names of the places in London which does not extend to those of Edinburgh," he says. "The Canongate is almost as long as the Strand, but it will not bear the comparison upon paper; and Blackfriars Wynd can never vie with Drury Lane." The Canongate is one of the grandest old streets in Europe, and was still at that period, whatever its sanitary conditions may have been, the abode of the remnants of those great people for whom its stately houses were built, and it is amusing to hear that it is not to be compared to the Strand. This is very like Mrs. Harlecastle's speech in the play, when she asks, with regretful humility yet pride, How can any one have a manner who has never seen "the Pantheon, the Grotto Gardens, the Borough, and such places, where the nobility chiefly resort?"

Just so the Edinburgh critic sighs yet smiles, with an underlying consciousness that, after all, he is almost as fine a gentleman as those who flourished their canes in the Mall, or frequented the most classic of coffee-rooms. Yet those featureless and uncharacteristic fables were produced by Mackenzie and his coadjutors in the very heart of that merry, noisy, somewhat rough, profane, and convivial Edinburgh, which was, perhaps, the most individual of all local societies. They had their head-

quarters in Creech's shop, in the house once inhabited by Allan Ramsay, upon the brow of the hill, close to the spot once occupied by the old town cross, where in the afternoons all the town came out, to walk about the open space and listen to the bell-ringing, for want of a better entertainment; or rather to enjoy their jokes, which were more funny than refined, and their gossip, which was full of audacious freedom. To think that the "Man of Feeling" could have looked out daily upon this jovial crowd, and perhaps gone afterwards for his dish of tea to the close on the Castle Hill, where Mrs. Cockburn received Burns with enthusiasm, and where there were dances and junketings "nine couples on the floor" of the small drawing-room, and "the bairns vastly happy;" and many an old Scotch song and new anonymous ditty, in cunning imitation of the old, was made and sung—and yet have nothing but Mushrooms and Homespunns to talk about in his commentary on society! Perhaps he shook hands, on his way, with John Clerk of Eldin or Henry Erskine, broad Scots and broad jokers both, or rubbed shoulders with old Miss Suph Johnstone, the amazon of the day, whose song, "Eh! quo' the tod, it's a braw licht nicht," proves what her dialect was. He could not move a step, indeed, this elegant disciple of Addison and Rousseau, without having his ears offended with the vigorous vowels and gutturals, the daring wit, and audacious talk, of a community as strong as unrestrained, as profane and as convivial as ever made a town merry; and yet he gives us a glossary of Burns, and sets before us a gallery of pastels, swains, and nymphs, and conventional rustics and fine ladies, as his contribution to the satirical and sentimental history of his time.

This is all the more curious that Henry Mackenzie was no impostor, but really knew society, and was himself an important figure, none better known in Edinburgh, where



he lived to our own days, a highly respectable and respected townsman, bearing the romantic title of his principal work to his grave. "The Man of Feeling," which is a very mild dilution of the sentimentalism of the time, with a good deal of Sterne in it, and a good deal of Rousseau, is not without some prettiness of composition, and even occasional just remark. Perhaps it was a certain pride in the thought that Scotland had here produced an elegant moralist of her own to rival her richer and greater neighbour, who up to this time had been unquestionably in advance of her in this as in most other departments of literature, which gave to the work its unusual popularity. However it may pique our patriotism to say so, it is no doubt true that Scotland, like every junior partner in a great historical union, has always had a most lively jealousy of her wealthy sister, and delighted in nothing so much as in the ability to hold her own in all peaceful contests of arts or letters. While neither Burns nor Scott existed, Henry Mackenzie was always something: and perhaps it pleased the jocund little capital all the better that he stood up to the adversary on his own ground, giving her a Lounger of her own in emulation of all the Spectators and Ramblers, than if he had struck out the fresh vein of her own humours and oddities, which was happily reserved for a more potent magician. There is nothing of what in these modern days of slang we call "bumptiousness" in the "Man of Feeling." He is too well-bred to throw down his glove to the potentates over the Border. He prefers, with plausible elegance, to prove that there is no manner of difference between them. In early youth, indeed, he was seduced into one or two attempts to copy the old Scotch ballad, that effort of industry being popular at the time. But his ballads had never been battled over, like Hardyknute and Sir Patrick Spens, and are very inferior

productions—while the didactic verse, into which he flowed inevitably afterwards, is as full of reference to the ordinary subjects of “town,” as if the poet had never issued from within the sound of Bow Bells. When he describes the houses of the great, it is a town mansion which is his model, with “giant knocker” and powdered footman; when he rhymes his harmless fable about Truth and Business, it is a cockney in “a neat-built country box”—

“So near, that with an easy ride,  
A man may breakfast in Cheapside”—

who is his model of the latter quality. The fashionable auction where “Sir Lappet” hurries in his “papillots,” chattering politics and bric-a-brac—

“The Queen of Denmark—there’s a figured bowl,  
The marquis writes me that the Tuesday’s poll—  
What gewgaw things! your glass, my lord: are these,  
Oh miserably vulgar! not Chinese!”

and all the Laelios and Lamias, the city turtle, the dissipations of the great, are all imitations and antiquated imitations, the fashion taking some time to travel from London to Edinburgh. The “Man of Feeling” has to deal with peasants of romantic nature and the finest sentiments, and with unfortunates upon the streets who are as delicate and refined as any princess, and whose betrayal into vice has every machination of villainy to excuse it; who are, indeed, only the more immaculate and interesting from having sinned. The benefactor and hero is a gentle youth, who lives but to do good, and be loved, and who, after an unfortunate interval of doubt as to the affections of the matchless maiden whom he has chosen, dies of the joy of hearing that she loves him! This is indeed a superfine hero, and everything he says and does is equally delicate and

irreproachable. The "Man of the World" which followed, and which is equally fine, but much more objectionable, has a mixture of Richardson in his worst peculiarities, the hairbreadth escapes of Pamela, over and over repeated—and not always escapes: with an absence both of wit and nature which takes all possible right of existing from such detestable complications. Julia de Roubigné is a poor little shadow from the other Julia of the *Nouvelle Heloise*. So sapless, imitative, and artificial were the productions which held the palm of literary achievement in the capital of Scotland, when Burns, eager, yet proud, distrustful, and suspicious, holding himself on his guard like some herald, or bearer of a flag of truce in an enemy's country, appeared to the wonder and admiration, yet doubt and alarm, of the old sovereigns of literature. The honour that remains to the "Man of Feeling" is that he had discrimination and sense enough to give his word of praise, and that with no stinted hand, to the ploughman poet.

The other correct and regular poet of the time was Dr. Blacklock, who also, to his great credit, at once recognised and applauded the new light. His poetry is of the same smooth and characterless description, but his story is a touching one; he was blind from his infancy, but was so kindly guarded and served both by relations and friends that, though without means of his own, he acquired a classical education, or at least enough of it to qualify him for the Church of Scotland, not much more exacting then than was the Church of England when she received Crabbe with nothing but a little Latin into her bosom. He got a living, but his parishioners were not satisfied with their blind pastor, and after an interval of discomfort he left them in the hands of a substitute, reserving some portion of the stipend to live upon, and with this came to Edinburgh, where he received into his

house young men attending the University, and was himself received into the genial society of the place. He got a good and tender wife notwithstanding his blindness, and a great deal of that respect mingled with compassion, which a man, so heavily burdened in the way of life, almost invariably inspires, but which perhaps is always a half-humiliating sympathy. Poems with such titles as "Ode to Aurora on Melusa's Birthday," "Ode to a Young Gentleman bound for Guinea," etc., sufficiently indicate the character of his verses. In the short memoir which we have of him, written by Mackenzie, there are a great many special quotations made, and lines selected, to show that, notwithstanding his blindness, he was capable of describing nature. This, of course, must have been simply in imitation of the lavish colours, the purple evenings and rosy mornings of the poets: but there is a pathetic correctness in his enumeration of the yellow crocuses and purple hyacinths, which touches the heart. He was a good man, and, considering his infirmity, prosperous and fortunate. But the consciousness of this disability appears to have kept him somewhat sad, and his later life seems to have been touched with melancholy from a very natural cause. "Some of his later poems express a chagrin, though not of an ungentle sort, at the supposed failure of his imaginative powers; or," "the Man of Feeling" adds, "at the fastidiousness of modern times, which he despaired to please." Poor gentle poet!—his "Muse," his gift of "Song," had been the sole ground upon which he had risen into local reputation; and there are few more moving occasions for at least a sentimental sympathy. We feel with him, even if we smile at the hot but weak indignation with which he stigmatises the new standards—standards, alas! which he could never come up to, and which settled his fate.

“Such were his efforts, such his cold reward,  
Whom once thy partial tongue pronounced a bard.  
Excursive on the gentle gales of spring  
He rov’d, while favour imp’d his timid wing,  
Exhausted genius now no more inspires ;  
But mourns abortive hopes and faded fires.  
The short-lived wreath, which once his temples graced,  
Fades at the sickly breath of squeamish taste,  
Whilst darker days his fainting flames immure  
In cheerless gloom, and winter premature.”

Again we say poor poet ! He had as much right to call the new influences which condemned his old-fashioned rigid verse, “a squeamish taste,” as they had to break up the foundations and scatter the waning honours of that lingering, feeble superstructure, which had been elongated like a house of cards upon the system of Pope. He showed his insight above any of the other tuneful brethren by recognising that his day was over, and his laurels incapable of supporting that “sickly breath.” These discontented verses are the swansong of the ending age. “The Man of Feeling” was conscious, for his own part, of no such failure.

At the same time there existed in Old Edinburgh, in the very region where flourished the *Mirror* and the *Lounger*, and all their far-fetched conventionalisms, a true and generous little concert of songs rising from various quarters, which handed on a better tradition, from Allan Ramsay, whose pastoral strain, if not without affectation, had rung true and clear, down to Burns. They were chiefly women, ladies of the best blood and breeding, who performed this genial office, with little parade, and more enjoyment than fame. “The grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spens,” as Coleridge calls it, was, all authorities are now agreed in saying, an innocent forgery, and written by Lady Wardlaw, who was the author of several other mock-antique ballads, which, however, were not

mock poetry, but worthy the place they attained. Miss Jean Elliot produced one of the versions of the "Flowers of the Forest," Mrs. Cockburn another: while Lady Anne Lindsay gave us the exquisite and pathetic little romance of "Auld Robin Gray," a ballad so true to the soil, so pure and tender in sentiment, that its genuine truth and nature make all the artificial features of the surrounding literature look more false than ever—

"Oh, lady nursed in pomp and pleasure,  
Where gat ye that heroic measure?"

How was it that art, so true yet so simple, could exist in so many obscure corners, while the false and bedizened artifice which took her place sat in the high places, and was constituted the judge of everything? This is one of the curious circumstances in literary history which it is difficult to explain, except from the fact that the frost stiffens with a kind of desperation the moment before the south winds begin to blow, and the ice chains to melt away. Behind backs, out of the reach of the critics, Edinburgh no doubt laughed in her sleeve at the "Man of Feeling." But Scotland has always cherished such songs as these in her heart. They breathed about the country far and wide, and were known and sung long before they were printed, the national genius for song having survived everything; and it was appropriate that through this homely channel the revival should come. What does Mr. Carlyle say: "The smallest cranny through which a great soul ever shone"? But when he said this, he forgot what we do not doubt he very well knows,<sup>1</sup> all that song has been to Scotland since that speech was made about the making of laws and the making of ballads. Song, or rather Songs: the word in the plural

<sup>1</sup> These words were written before the loss of Scotland's last great writer, which we have now to lament.

has perhaps a somewhat different meaning, not that of a melody only, which might please the hearers almost as much if Do-re-mi were the syllables employed to give it utterance, but an art which was poetry, at least as much as music, and into which thousands entered with enjoyment for the sake chiefly of the beautiful "words." This distinction is perhaps worth the consideration of the student. Ballads like "Auld Robin Gray," songs like the "Flowers of the Forest," were a great deal more than music; the simple old tune "set" to each was little more than the breath which carried the poetry into many a melting heart. This mingled faculty, half one art, half the other, was never extinguished, and always independent of the verse-maker's elaborate rules. It was the breath of life in old Scotland. When the "Man of Feeling" reigned in artificial and tottering state, these collections of songs, unnoted messengers, flew about the country to which they were indigenous, keeping up in it a soul of fresh and natural sentiment when there was little else to do so—a fact which made it more appropriate than any one has cared to acknowledge that the new power in literature in the north, the new poet, should take by nature to this national medium, the art his country has always loved.

HENRY MACKENZIE, the Man of Feeling, born 1745; died 1831; published his chief work 1771.

THOMAS BLACKLOCK, born 1721; died 1791; published volume of poems 1746.

## CHAPTER IV.

GEORGE CRABBE.

AT the very time when the two unconscious revolutionaries who have occupied our time so long were loosing the bands and opening the prison gates of poetry, and, with her, of literature in general, there was happening at the same moment one of those curious returns upon old customs, which so often give a whimsical variety to a great movement. It would be amiss to say that Crabbe had no part in the new revolution. He whose themes are so severely chosen from annals unknown to the Graces, and whose stern submission to fact deepened and strengthened what we may call the imaginative realism of his great contemporaries, had his full part in the destruction of those attenuated canons of literary art, which were no longer capable of restraining the impulse of the new life; but nothing could be more entirely in accordance with all the conventional laws of a poet's struggle, and final acceptance by the world, than the early facts of his history. All that was ever written of Grub Street comes true in his tale of misery and aspiration. He is at his outset the very poet of Hogarth, the philosophical vagabond of Goldsmith, the poor author whose image it is so hard to dissociate even from the hard-working and well-to-do literature of to-day. While Cowper was roaming gently and legitimately, yet, so far



as contemporary opinion went, wildly enough by all the windings of the Ouse, patronless, and indifferent to everything but the diversion of his own distracted spirit; and Burns bringing out through a local printer, and for local gratification, his first modest volume—Crabbe was starving in London, writing letter after letter to one magnate after another, in hopes of being picked up out of his garret, and on the strength of approbation from some acknowledged authority, finding himself at last on the way to fame. There could not be a more curious difference—all the more as Johnson and his supporters had thrown cold water on Grub Street, and all but pulled down the great Dagon of patronage. New ideas, however, travel slowly, and perhaps the son of the rough Suffolk “Saltmaster,” half-official, half-fisherman, was not aware that the patron, as a literary institution, had got his deathblow. To him London was still a place where the streets were paved with gold—where genius was understood, and poetry a sort of “Open Sesame” to every noble door. The contrast is extraordinary—and it becomes all the more marked from the fact that Crabbe was one of the few with whom the obsolete institution of literary patronage was entirely successful. He found the man, noble and generous, and open-hearted—noble, that is in heart and spirit, though not in rank—who is the ideal patron of whom every poet dreams: and whose image has always made it possible for visionary men to believe in and struggle after the favour of the great, hoping always to find under the graceful drapery of a title, that all-feeling, all-comprehending being, whose patronage will be an honour, and his help something like the help of an angel—“Is not a patron, my lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and when he has reached ground encumbers him with help?” Johnson had asked so long before as the

period of Crabbe's birth; but the country lad who came to London with his poems a hundred years ago, half educated, and completely inexperienced, retained the old notions that belonged to a previous generation, and never seems to have doubted that he would find some one to stand between him and want—nay, to open the way for him to success and fame. And the wonderful thing was that he succeeded and found what he sought.

George Crabbe was born in the seafaring village of Aldborough, on the Suffolk coast, in the year 1754. He was thus five years older than Burns. Except that he was an English villager with a touch of the sea in everything about him, his breeding was not much dissimilar from that of Burns, with the great difference, however, that the Scots parents' profound piety and anxious appreciation of education were wanting in the probably much more plentiful and comfortable home of the revenue officer. These were the days when salt was taxed, and Crabbe's father was the collector of the duties,—with a charge of warehouses it would appear,—probably custom-house warehouses, in which he made his sons fill up their idle time; but he was a man of violent temper and not of exemplary habits. Crabbe's education was of the smallest. When he was fourteen his professional training as a doctor, the trade (for it would be absurd to call it a profession) selected for him, began, and he entered upon life as an apprentice to a country surgeon. It is a curious illustration of the loose training of those days, that Crabbe set up for himself as a doctor in Aldborough at the age of two or three and twenty, with scarcely any further training in his profession than that he had received from the country surgeon, whose apprentice he had been. He was in London for a few months professedly attending the hospitals, and he was for some time assistant to an apothecary—but this was all his

education came to. Probably in that sharp sea air among those salt-marshes, and in days so much less occupied with sanitary considerations than our own, disease was more straightforward and simple than now—otherwise there is something appalling in the idea that the lives of a village might be committed to the charge of a youth so imperfectly trained.

He did not like his profession, however, nor did it like him—and he was in love, and a poet. No doubt, though he was always a modest and somewhat matter-of-fact man, he felt in himself many faculties to which the dreary village life afforded no development—and dreams of some one who would appreciate and understand him, and of a larger existence in which his higher qualities would have scope, stirred within him. His home was mean and uncongenial, his Sarah hopelessly removed from him so long as he was without the means of maintaining her, and nothing but the angry sea, the oozing marshes, the dull peat bog and stubbly common, and low sky hanging over the flat country, composed his surroundings. “With the best verses he could write, and with very little more, he quitted the place of his birth, not without the most serious apprehensions of the consequences of such a step—apprehensions which were conquered, and barely conquered, by the more certain evil of the prospect before him, should he remain where he was.” When we add that the “very little more” which enabled the poor young surgeon to make this prodigious venture, was five pounds borrowed from, or rather given by, a local magnate, Mr. Dudley North, the desperation of the project will be all the more apparent. He obtained this by writing to Mr. North, with whom he does not seem to have had any prior acquaintance. His passage to London, though only in a sloop sailing from a neighbouring little seaport, in which he lived with the sailors, cost him a

considerable part of the sum—and he arrived in London with a “box of clothes, a small case of surgical instruments, and three pounds”—no friends nor any resource by which he could help himself, and nothing but the poems in his pocket upon which to build his forlorn hope. He lived at first in a hairdresser’s shop, was kindly patronised by a linen-draper in Cornhill, and spent his evenings at “a small coffee-house near the Exchange,” where he was so fortunate as to meet respectable and intelligent companions. But even such humble delights were not long to be kept up upon nothing. The first thing he did was to offer his poems for publication. “Sylvanus Urban” rejected them with good-humoured contempt. Then he began to write letters, which, had he not been a poet, could be called nothing but begging-letters, to one great personage after another. Lord North, the Prime Minister, took no notice of his application, neither did Lord Shelburne. Thurlow, to whom he enclosed some of his verses, returned a cold note, regretting that he had no time to read poetry. We do not know whether Prime Ministers and Lord Chancellors now-a-days have similar applications made to them; but the impartial reader will feel almost an equal pity for the high functionaries who were thus at the mercy of every rhymester. Crabbe was received graciously at their tables in after years, and made the inevitable reflections on the subject—but our wonder at the boldness of the young poet is greater, we fear, than our indignation with the great men who did not take him up. Granting, however, that his possession of the poetic gift gave him a claim upon the rulers of the country, the bitterness of his repeated disappointment is very real. To Lord Shelburne he sends a letter, half in verse, half in prose, “Ah, Shelburne, blest with all that’s good or great,” cries the poor poet:

"Oh hear the Virtue thou reverest plead ;  
She'll swell thy breast, and there applaud the deed.  
She bids thy thoughts one hour from greatness stray,  
And leads thee on to fame a shorter way ;  
Where, if no withering laurel's thy reward  
There's shouting Conscience, and a grateful Bard ;  
A Bard untrained in all but misery's school,  
Who never bribed a knave or praised a fool ;—  
'Tis Glory prompts, and as thou read'st attend,  
She dictates pity, and becomes my friend ;  
She bids each cold and dull reflection flee,  
And yields her Shelburne to distress and me,!"

"My lord," he adds, "I now turn to your lordship, and entreat to be heard. I am ignorant what to ask, but feel forcibly my wants—patronage and bread. I know no other claim on your lordship than my necessities, unless my Muse, and she has, I am afraid, as few charms."

In the depths of private life it happens to us all to receive letters scarcely less touching, and quite as unauthorised ; but it is to be feared that we show very little respect for their eloquence. To meet with the model of such productions in the writing of a poet who has since found a place in the records of fame, is curious enough. The fashion was dying down to a low level even then, but had not quite gone. Lord Shelburne took no notice of this effusion, but Crabbe, when years after he was the guest of the statesman whose favour he had sought in vain, recalled, not unkindly, the different conditions in which he waited at those same doors with his heart beating, looking for a reply that never came. His journal of this anxious period of his life is wonderfully natural and affecting. It is addressed to Mira, which was the poetical of plain Sarah, his betrothed ; but when disappointment and trouble overwhelm him, when he has "but sixpence farthing in the world," and so many melancholy appeals flying about which the great people will take no notice of, it is with a touching return to fact

and nature that he cries, "Oh, Sally, how I want you!" from the bottom of his heart.

The London in which Crabbe thus starved and struggled was a more picturesque, if not so comfortable, London than the one we are familiar with. He gives his Mira a description of the Gordon riots which took place during the summer. "In my way I met a resolute band of vile-looking fellows, ragged, dirty, and insolent, armed with clubs, going to join their companions." He stands and looks on while Newgate is pulled to pieces, and "never saw anything so dreadful." When the governor's house was reduced to "a mere shell of brick-work, they kept a store of flame there for other purposes; it became red-hot, and the doors and windows appeared like the entrances to so many volcanoes. But I must not omit" (he adds) "what struck me most. About ten or twelve of the mob getting to the top of the debtors' prison, whilst it was burning, to halloo, they appeared rolled in black smoke mixed with sudden bursts of fire, like Milton's infernals." Through these lurid gleams he sees the prisoners "conducted through the streets in their chains." Plesanter are the records of his Sunday experiences, when he goes to church, and sends the sermon to refresh his reader. "As I'm afraid my ever dearest Mira has not a preacher so affecting as my worthy rector, I shall not scruple to give his morning discourse in the way I have abstracted those before." Thus the anxious maiden in Suffolk has a share in all he says or does; and though the absolute dependence of the young man upon hopes so chimerical as the patronage of statesmen for his "Muse" is very strange to us now-a-days, yet his confidence, and tenderness, and piety, make a very pleasant picture—not too sad, since success comes at the end.

Dr Johnson was still living, and the greatest author-

ity in letters ; but it does not seem to have occurred to Crabbe to appeal to the great autocrat. It is somewhat curious, indeed, to find in Cowper, whose career began during the early reign of Johnson, and in Crabbe, who crossed that reign towards its end, so little recognition of the great Pope of Literature, who to our eyes dominates his age. Nothing can be more remarkable, however, than the blindness of contemporaries, and perhaps Johnson was too alarming for the new generation, never much disposed to acknowledge the masters of a former cycle. When he had exhausted all other resources young Crabbe addressed himself in his despair to Burke. He sent him a long letter, giving a narrative of his distressed condition and the disappointment of all his hopes, in which several of his poems were enclosed. His situation was almost hopeless when he took his little packet to Burke's door. "I appeal to you, sir, as a good, and, let me add, a great man. I have no other pretensions to your favour but that I am an unhappy one," said the poor young adventurer. "Mr. Burke," says Crabbe's son and biographer, "was at this period (1781) engaged in the hottest turmoil of parliamentary opposition, and his own pecuniary circumstances were by no means very affluent ; yet he gave instant attention to this letter and the verses it enclosed. He immediately appointed an hour for my father to call upon him at his house in London, and the short interview that ensued entirely and for ever changed the nature of his worldly fortunes. He was in the common phrase 'a made man' from that hour. He went into Mr. Burke's rooms a poor young adventurer, spurned by the opulent and rejected by the publishers, his last shilling gone, and all but his last hope with it ; he came out virtually secure of almost all the good fortune that by successive steps fell to his lot ; his genius acknowledged by one whose verdict could not be questioned ; his

character and manners approved by a noble and generous heart, whose benevolence knew no limits but its power."

The relations between patron and dependant cannot be called either wholesome or pleasant, and literature has little occasion to regret the change of system; still, there is something in this sudden deliverance which touches the heart more than any mere bookselling. To go, poor and quivering with the keen shafts of anxiety, seeing no light around you, and no way of escape from your trouble, into some gracious presence, and in a moment—in the gleam of genial eyes, in the very tone of a voice—to feel yourself saved from all that wretchedness, and the doors of life softly rolled open before you; and in addition to all, a friend gained for life and for death, what sudden happiness could be like it? The young applicant had his poems and a stainless character; but, except these, scarce anything else—a little Latin, a very little medicine; no money, no friends, no connections; and Sally in the country (who is Mira on fine days when the sun is shining), gazing wistfully over the gloomy sea and the flat barren waste, for every post that came in and every sad letter. What a letter he must have written to her that evening! How he must have lingered on every feature of the noble patron, and every word he had uttered! To the country lad it was a great thing to have seen Burke at all; but to have won his smile and his favour, to have heard him say, "He has the mind and feelings of a gentleman," to have received the promise of his help, the immediate recognition of his friendship, what blessedness was this!

Crabbe was of the virtuous kind. He must have borne his evidences of modesty, honour, and manliness, and of a character which never would bring shame upon any one who befriended him, in his countenance. He was little more educated than Burns, and not half so



eloquent or entrancing; yet how great is the difference! Partly, no doubt, this difference was in the warm-hearted Irishman whose generosity was so ready and so kind. But Burke did not take his countryman Goldsmith in hand as he took Crabbe; there must be, on the other hand, a something in the protected which will respond to the efforts of the protector. Burns going off from the midst of the lords and ladies to a tavern in the wynds, where, in the wild talk and encounter of wags and wits, these lords and ladies were sometimes the subjects of the laughter—was a very different sort of being to protect and push forward from this gentle and good young fellow, who never was less than respectable and orderly, whatever he did—a man full of natural duty and submission, sure to do his patron credit. Why is it that every man of genius could not be as Crabbe was? Burke seems to have taken the young fellow from his city garret, from the lowliness of his sea-side village, into his own house, “domesticated him under his own roof, and treated him like a son.” Alas! if Burns had got such a chance it is most likely some cloud of offence, some dropt decorum, or sharp touch of sarcasm, would have broken the bond within a week. In Crabbe’s case the adoption of the poet and his interests by this generous protector, who had never seen him twenty-four hours before, was complete. Much has been said about literary jealousies and quarrels, but little about the helpful hand which many a man of letters has held out to his brother. Burke was more than a mere man of letters; but he could not be left out in any literary history, and we do not know where to find another instance of such complete and powerful help to the ignorant and inexperienced. He went over the poems with the young author, pointing out to him certain apparent faults, which the young man amended with ready compliance. “When

all was done that his abilities permitted, and when Mr. Burke had patiently waited the progress of improvement in the man whom he conceived to be capable of it, he himself took 'The Library' to Mr. Dodsley, then of Pall Mall, and gave many lines the advantage of his own reading and comments. Mr. Dodsley listened with all the respect due to the reader of the verses, and all the apparent desire to be pleased that could be wished by the writer; and he was as obliging in his reply as in the very nature of things a bookseller can be supposed to be towards a young candidate for poetical reputation." This is somewhat enigmatical; but its meaning seems to be that Dodsley, who had before rejected the MS. summarily, published it now at the poet's risk, and, with a generosity not common, "gave to the author his profits as a publisher and vendor of the pamphlet."

The success of 'The Library' gave some reputation to the author, and was the occasion of his second poem, 'The Village,' which was corrected and a considerable portion of it written in the house of his excellent friend, whose own activity and energy of mind would not permit a young man under his protection to cease from labour, and whose judgment directed that labour to its most useful attainments." The exertions of this "excellent friend" were not confined to one mode of affording assistance. "Mr. Crabbe was encouraged to lay open his views past and present; to display whatever reading and acquirements he possessed; to explain the causes of his disappointments and the cloudiness of his prospects, in short, to conceal nothing from a friend so able to guide inexperience and so willing to pardon inadvertency." "It was in the course of one of their walks" (adds the son who has quoted the above from an autobiographical sketch which his father left behind him) "that Burke, after some conversation on general literature, suggested by a passage

in the Georgics which he had happened to quote, on observing something that was going on in his favourite farm, passed to a more minute inquiry into my father's early days in Suffolk than he had before made, and drew from him the avowal that with respect to future affairs he had a strong partiality for the church. 'It is most fortunate,' said Mr. Burke, 'that your father exerted himself to send you to that second school: without a little Latin we should have made nothing of you; now I think we shall succeed.' "

Here was true patronage; and it is impossible to have a better view of the advantages and disadvantages of that happy system. Upon the score of this "little Latin," and a few inquiries made into Crabbe's character in his native place as a matter of form, the statesman and orator, backed by other influences, got the Bishop of Norwich to ordain right away, apparently without study or preparation of any kind, the fortunate object of his kindness. In this particular case, as no doubt in many others, no harm, but a great deal of good came of it, and probably neither Oxford nor Cambridge, nor all the theological faculties in existence, could have created a better country parson than the poor surgeon's apprentice out of Suffolk, the half-trained doctor whom an indulgent bishop accepted on Burke's word, backed by the favourable representations of Mr. Dudley North (the original lender of the five pounds) and Mr. Charles Long. But to make Sancho Panza a governor was scarcely a more arbitrary exercise of patronage. Every day such arrangements were becoming less possible, and Burke belonged to the advancing side, if not actually to anything that could be called the party of progress, when he thus gave, at the end of the system, the most triumphant evidence of its power. This power extended into every quarter from which advantage could come to the young poet. "When

'The Library' was published, the opinion of Burke had its effect upon the conductors of the various periodical works of the time. The poet received complimentary *critiques* from the very gentlemen who had hitherto treated him with such contemptuous coldness." And in still higher regions the same all-prevailing influence told. "His kind patron had spoken of him in favourable terms to the stern and formidable Thurlow, and his lordship was now anxious to atone for his former neglect. He received Mr. Crabbe (having invited him to breakfast) with more than courtesy, and most condescendingly said, 'The first poem you sent me, sir, I ought to have noticed; and I heartily forgive the second.' They breakfasted together, and at parting his lordship put a sealed paper into my father's hand, saying, 'Accept this trifle, sir, in the meantime, and rely on my embracing an early opportunity to serve you more substantially when I hear that you are in orders.' As soon as he left the house he opened the letter, expecting to find a present of ten or perhaps twenty pounds; it contained a bank-note for a hundred!" Could any incident show more clearly the extraordinary change which a century has made? A young poet of our days would be as much confounded by the generosity of "Accept this trifle, sir," as if his noble entertainer had kicked him downstairs, however much the hundred pounds might be wanted. We seem to have fallen back fifty years at least, even from the day of Cowper and of Burns—notwithstanding that the system of publishing by subscription must always have a certain eleemosynary aspect. Thurlow's promise, however, does not seem to have borne very much fruit, and Crabbe had no objection to the bird in hand, which was worth more than any in the bush.

"The Library" was as slight a foundation as could be imagined for "complimentary *critiques*" and poetical

fame. To conceive of it, indeed, as appearing an independent publication, among other books, and attracting any notice at all, makes the reader's head go round. It is shorter than any of the individual poems which formed Cowper's first volume, and is so completely of the old order of manufactured verses, ground out by the "mere mechanic art," which was Pope's legacy to the world, that we can but look back astonished at the possibility of finding, in such a production, the foundation of a lasting fame. Here, as in the sudden transition of the author from the wretchedness of destitution to all the comfortable certainties which his friends provided for him, we feel ourselves in an earlier age, a different world. Other "singers" were twittering, at the time in various corners, gentle Hayley, whom we love for his kindness to Cowper, learned Darwin among the fantastic sentimentalities of his garden, whom his greater grandson has restored to the recollection of the world, and many more. So far as this earliest production of Crabbe's "Muse" goes, there would seem to have been little reason to separate him from the mildly-tuneful crowd; but the same Review which characterised Cowper as "a man of a sober and religious turn of mind, with a benevolent heart, and a serious wish to inculcate the precepts of morality," but "not possessed of any superior abilities or power of genius," described Crabbe's little composition as "the production of no common pen"—so strangely uncertain are the guides of popular opinion.

The halcyon moment, however, which the young man spent under Burke's roof as a member of his family, meeting all the great people of the day, and presented with little billets such as the above, could not last for ever. And after his ordination he seems to have had an immediate experience of the other side of life, which was not encouraging. His first occupation was as curate of

Aldborough, and it can scarcely be supposed that his native place, where every rough fellow about the little pier had known him familiarly in a position very different from that which he now occupied, would afford a comfortable beginning in his new profession. He was "unkindly received," and saw so many "unfriendly countenances about me," that "I am sorry to say," he continues, "I had too much indignation, though mingled, I hope, with better feelings, to care what they thought of me or my sermon." This was not a very promising way of beginning a clergyman's life; and though we are all aware that a prophet has no honour in his own country, it is painful to hear of unfriendly faces on the one side, and to see on the other what a gloomy aspect the place, and everything in it, bore to Crabbe's eye. No glamour of kindly association is in the picture he gives of this native village. The very landscape becomes blighted and barren under his hands—

"Rank weeds that every art and care defy,  
Reign o'er the land, and rob the blighted rye;  
There thistles stretch their prickly arms afar,  
And to the ragged infant threaten war.

\* \* \* \* \*

Here joyless roam a wild amphibious race,  
With sullen woe display'd in every face,  
Who far from civil arts and social fly,  
And scowl at strangers with suspicious eye.

\* \* \* \* \*

As on the neighbouring beach yon swallows stand,  
And wait for favouring winds to leave the land;  
While still for flight the ready wing is spread,  
So waited I the favouring hour, and fled—  
Fled from those shores where guilt and famine reign,  
And cried, ah, hapless, those who still remain!"

It is very unusual to find a poet thus gloomily revengeful of early unkindness, giving up his native village to the horror of his readers. Burns had fewer comforts

to look back upon than those possessed by Crabbe, yet "Coila" was to him the queen of countries, and his dearest hope was

"For puir auld Scotia's sake,  
Some useful plan or buik to make,  
Or sing a sang at least."

But these distinctions will always remain both in life and poetry, and some souls receive with enthusiasm of kindness what others take as cause for endless complaint and hostility. Perhaps, indeed, his almost invariable preference for the darker side, and sense of the matter-of-fact misery lying underneath every sentimental surface of country life, is more than anything else the cause of Crabbe's fame. From time immemorial every poet had celebrated the charms of that rural existence in which men were supposed to cultivate their own fields, to be made glad by the plentiful harvest, and consoled by the tranquillity around. But Crabbe saw "the knees tremble and the temples beat" of the reaper under "the dogstar's raging heat;" he saw the labourer return home, not forgetting all his cares like Burns's Cottar, but "imbibing the evening dew" through his "warm pores," and hoarding up "aches and anguish for his age." And it was scarcely possible that there could be much sympathy between him and his townfolk, whom he describes so bitterly, "the artful, surly, savage race," who had not cared for his ministrations to their bodies, and were little likely to be more disposed to receive his ministrations to their souls.

He remained here, accordingly, but a few months, and it seems evident, from all his after-experiences, that he never was popular as a clergyman. Perhaps a certain mixture of genial optimism and belief in the good qualities of the human race is necessary to the holder of

a cure of souls. And Burke, always his friend, was as unwilling as Crabbe could be, to let his *protégé* languish in a poor curacy, in that uncongenial salt-water atmosphere. He procured for him the position of domestic chaplain to the Duke of Rutland, "a station such as has in numerous instances led to the first dignities of the church." This happy result, however, did not happen in Crabbe's case. He was not more than two years at Belvoir, during which time he was presented by Thurlow—with an assurance that, "by God, he was as like Parson Adams as twelve to a dozen"—with two small livings in Dorsetshire—livings which he does not seem so much as to have visited for several years. Afterwards, by the interest of the Duchess of Rutland, he was permitted to exchange them for two of superior value in the vale of Belvoir; and this, until a late period of his life, was all the preferment he obtained.

It was while he was in Belvoir, entirely separated from the life to which he has given such forcible and gloomy expression, that "The Village," the first of Crabbe's works which indicated his true power in poetry and his real place in his generation, was published. It had been written some time before, and it is said that the stern vigour of the lines in which he expressed his satisfaction in escaping from his native place was the special part of his poetry which moved Burke to so high an estimate of him. The poem was of a very different order from the artificial commonplace of "The Library." It not only chimed in with the sweeter contemporary voices so soon to be raised in the interests of nature, by directing "the Muse" out of all the conventional scenery sacred to her, to the homes and common life of the poor—but it outdid both Burns and Cowper in this particular by showing these homes in the naked prose of their most matter-of-fact aspect, neither lovely, nor happy, nor con-



tented, but full of squalor, misery, and pain. This was the last touch in the picture, the discord that was needed for the perfection of the music. Fictitious pictures of peasant felicity have been common enough in all ages. When the luxurious have been sated with luxury, and the splendid with splendour, it has not been an unusual device to ape the simplicity of rustics, and make an elegant travesty of the life of the cottage to refresh the palace. In this way Marie Antoinette, when society was sickest, played at being a milkmaid in Trianon. And as in life, so in literature. Rousseau had set up the rural life as the only one that approached perfection, and with all the force of conventionality, had declared the conventional to be the bane of mankind. It was a poetical commonplace that Corydon and Phillis were blessed above all the emperors and kings. This has always stood first among the voluntary delusions which have pleased the over-civilised. It was Crabbe's special gift to dig his axe down to the very root of this last refuge of artificial sentiment—

“ . . . The Muses sing of happy swains,  
Because the Muses never knew their pains,”

he says ; and with all the fervour of indignant truth, and something of the sternness of a controversialist, places before us the bare and sober truth of that form of existence which all these pastoral pipes had celebrated in fictitious strains—

“ I grant indeed that fields and flocks have charms  
For him that grazes or for him that farms ;  
But when amid such pleasing scenes I trace  
The poor laborious natives of the place,  
And see the midday sun, with fervid ray,  
On their bare heads and dewy temples play ;  
While some, with feebler heads and fainter hearts,  
Deplore their fortune, yet sustain their parts—

Then shall I dare these real ills to hide,  
In tinsel trappings of poetic pride?

No; cast by Fortune on a frowning coast,  
Which neither groves nor happy valleys boast;  
Where other cares than those the Muse relates,  
And other shepherds dwell with other mates;  
By such examples taught, I paint the Cot,  
As Truth will paint it, and as Bards will not:  
Nor you, ye Poor, of letter'd scorn complain,  
To you the smoothest song is smooth in vain;  
O'ercome by labour, and bow'd down by time,  
Feel you the barren flattery of a rhyme?  
Can poets soothe you, when you pine for bread,  
By winding myrtles round your ruin'd shed?"

This was Crabbe's mission in the new age. Cowper took England back to the spontaneity and ease of Nature, and showed her how much more beautiful and perfect was the real landscape even of her plains and undistinguished fields, and how much nearer the heart the incidents and accidents of daily life, than any inverted antithesis of savage mountains and smiling valleys, of Rapture and Despair. And Burns brought out the very sweetness of the natural heart, its tender musings, its love, its mirth, its compassion, the great thoughts, the sorrows, and joys that dwell in all human houses, as in his dwellings of the poor. These were the apostles of an equality such as needed no blood or tears to establish its beneficent law, which bound together the highest and the lowest, not by casting down one or raising up another, but by revealing each to each, where each was most real, and showing how love and grief, and all the inner consciousness of humanity, were among all true lovers, fathers, mothers, children, in all conditions the same. Crabbe's work was the completion of all this, though the more painful part. It was to dispel a false light which had separated the peasant, artificially, just as much as pride of place had separated the peer, from the general

sympathy—to prove the Arcadian fields to be regions of labour, hard and bitter, as any on earth, and the happy peasant to demand all the pity, all the succour, that the wretched need. Crabbe forged the last link in the chain—overthrew the last delusion. He led the student of Belinda's curls back to human life as Cowper did, and Burns; but he taught him a sterner lesson—a lesson equally essential to the clearing and opening up of the new world. "The Village" is entirely occupied with this task. The description of the dreary heath, and flat unfertile sands, the weeds that paint the country with vain splendour, "like the nymphs whom wretched arts adorn," the inhabitants, full of "sullen woe," strikes a key-note, which is carried out from page to page with bitterer force—

"Where are the swains, who, daily labour done,  
With rural games play'd down the setting sun?"

they are occupied in the arts of the smuggler or the wrecker—

"Or will you deem them amply paid in health,  
Labour's fair child that languishes with wealth?"

the poet asks, and draws us that picture of the labourer, to which we have already referred, strained to his utmost through the day, infected with all the miasmas of the damp air at night—the weak striving to keep up with the strong "till long-contending nature drops at last."

"Or will ye praise that homely, healthy fare,  
Plenteous and plain, that happy peasants share?"

he cries: and shows them crushed by "the missing of a stinted meal." Then comes a picture of the old man who once drew the straightest furrow, and was "chief in all the rustic trade," now driven from one petty occupation to another and with no refuge but the workhouse,

of which such a picture follows as makes the reader shudder—

“Theirs is yon House that holds the parish poor,  
Whose walls of mud scarce bear the broken door;  
There, where the putrid vapours, flagging, play,  
And the dull wheel hums doleful through the day;—  
There children dwell, who know no parent’s care—  
Parents, who know no children’s love, dwell there!  
Dejected widows with unheeded tears,  
And crippled age with more than childhood’s fears;  
The lame, the blind, and, far the happiest they!  
The moping idiot, and the madman gay.”

Nor does the poet leave the poor man, whom he traces remorselessly through all these miseries till he has deposited him, without even the burial ceremonies of religion—for

“The busy priest, detain’d by weightier care,  
Defers his duty till the day of prayer”—

among the “mingled relics of the parish poor.”

Thus Crabbe fulfils his part without flinching in the great work that had to be done. To disclose the poor man, that he is as good as yourself, with as many sweetenings of affection, as many sublime thoughts in his lowliness, was the mission of one poet; to disclose him sternly as so much worse than yourself, though your own flesh and blood, is the harsher errand of the other: but both of them were wanted, and without the one the other would not have been complete. Not one more than another of these poets was conscious of his mission. No burden of prophecy weighed upon the heart of the gentle pluralist, the good parson who retained an inclination towards dukes and great folks all his life, and was never very popular among the class from which he sprang, and whose sufferings impressed him with all the more horror that he had but just escaped them in his

own person—any more than there was in Burns a consciousness of the gaping wondering world looking on, while his plough disturbed the mouse and crushed the daisy, and asking, with a gasp of incredulous amazement, where he got those thoughts so much above his place? That the sublimest thoughts were not above that place, nor yet the most squalid misery below the enduring of these heirs of heaven, was what the two had to tell. It was of more worth to the world than the fiery doctrines which were being proclaimed in blood and flame across the Channel—of more worth because going below the outsides of things, and preaching no arbitrary equality and fraternity, but a brotherhood and a common standing-ground which was fundamental. Burns “rhymed for fun,” that is for the relief of his own spirit, to find a natural outlet for that which was in him—and Cowper for health, for distraction, to find in the company of the poet’s unknown friends, those who had ears and could hear, deliverance from himself. Crabbe was less spontaneous than either of them; he had the mark of the old *régime* upon him: he wrote his poems in the way of honest daily work, and with a distinct object: not knowing much more about the deeper scope of what he said than that the bias of his nature inclined him to such and such subjects. But all three, nevertheless, unconsciously worked together and helped each other out.

To show how differently these poems got into being from the others we have already treated, we may follow the course of “The Village” into the world. It was sent by the author to Burke, who transmitted it in his turn to Johnson. The autocrat received it very graciously. “It is original, vigorous, and elegant,” he writes. “The alterations which I have made I do not require him to adopt, *for my lines are perhaps not often better than his own.*” Boswell too refers to the incident with great

pride in the benignity of his idol. "The sentiments of Mr. Crabbe's admirable poem as to the false notions of rustic happiness and rustic virtue, were quite congenial with Dr. Johnson's own, and he took the trouble not only to suggest slight corrections and variations, but to furnish some lines *where he thought he could give the writer's meaning better than in the words of the manuscript.*" Crabbe does not seem to have found fault either with this exercise of autocratic criticism, or the benign humility of the admission, that "perhaps my lines are not often better than his own"—and adopted the six lines which Johnson supplied apparently without a murmur; while Boswell adds, with smiling complacency yet candour, "I must, however, observe that the aids he gave to this poem, as to the 'Traveller' and the 'Deserted Village' of Goldsmith, were so small, as by no means to impair the distinguished merit of the author." But when the poem had gone through this wonderful ordeal more remained. It was again revised by Burke, who "proposed one or two trivial alterations, which my father's grateful feelings induced him to adopt, although they did not appear to himself improvements." "There were not wanting, I have heard," adds Crabbe's son and biographer, with natural indignation, "friends in Suffolk, who, when 'The Village' came out, whispered that the manuscript had been so cobbled by Burke and Johnson, that Crabbe did not know it again when it was returned to him." Perhaps these good-natured friends were not without some excuse for their mistake—being ignorant, as such critics are, that neither Burke nor Johnson could have written "The Village" with all their united genius, to save their lives.

Crabbe married shortly after, and his career had but few vicissitudes—a removal from one parsonage to another, the births and deaths that fill to overflowing the

hearts of those most immediately concerned, yet count for so little in the outward history; a married life not quite so blissful as the faithful love before it had promised; and yet no tragic troubles of any kind, nothing but the mingled thread in which there is generally so much more of the dark than bright, of common life. Notwithstanding the wonderful good fortune of his beginning, no special advantage came to him afterwards in his career, which, so far as his profession was concerned, was a very ordinary course of small promotions and indifferent content. He was benevolent and kind, but not generally popular—worshipped by his children, but greatly restrained in his social instincts by the delicate health of his wife, and not very happy at home. He was a great botanist, a mathematician, and an industrious student, making up the deficiencies of his preliminary education both in classics and the modern languages, reading a great deal, and thus occupying himself with many of those aids to existence, which help a man, not too busy or too happy, to get through the lingering years. "The Village" was published in 1783. In 1785 an insignificant and unmeaning production called "The Newspaper" appeared, dedicated to Thurlow; and it was not till the year 1806, twenty-two years after, that the "Parish Register," the author's next work, was completed. Between these two dates so much had happened that it was nothing less than a new world, into which the poet, with the same message on his lips, enlarged and rounded with superior art, yet perhaps in its diffuseness less impressive than the terse solemnity of "The Village," now reappeared. Such a gap breaks any life in two: but it did so still more at a period when the whole face of English literature was being remodelled, and one of the greatest waves of poetical genius which the world has known had swept over the country. Crabbe lived long enough to take his

part, after the share he had in the opening of this poetical era, amidst the full concert of younger voices, all sweeter, tenderer, more sympathetic than his own, yet wanting his harsh note to give them musical perfection.

In point of religious feeling Crabbe was at the opposite extreme of sentiment from Cowper. The private journals of his youth show him devout and pious—but in all the expressions of his maturer life it is evident that the staid ideal of a composed and moderate religiousness, which seems to belong to a dignified establishment and settled irrevocable system, was his highest model of Christianity—and that all undue zeal or fervour appeared enthusiasm or fanaticism to his sober eyes. He was greatly annoyed when he went to Muston, one of the livings which he had held for years without ever visiting it, to find dissent flourishing within the fold.

“True to his Church he came ; no Sunday-shower  
Kept him at home in that important hour ;  
Nor his firm feet could one persuading sect,  
By the strong glare of their new light direct,”

is the description he gives of the “noble peasant Isaac Ashford,” one of the few ideal sketches in his repository. He has no sympathy with the painful strain of religious anxiety, or any vehement attempt to ameliorate the lives of others, or purify the general stream of existence. He is not oppressed or disturbed in his own soul by the evils round him, but accepts and describes them methodically as the natural drawbacks of humanity. Of the parsons whom he brings in review before us in the “Parish Register,” through the reminiscences of the old sexton Dibble, it is difficult to guess which he sympathises with most. They are all treated with the same matter-of-fact, semi-satirical, and quite impartial touch. The good sleepy soul who slumbers even in the pulpit; the wit who grinds the parish and takes tithes even from the sexton;



the "golden times" of the wealthy and liberal parson, at whose "plenteous board" even "cool Dissenters fed," and who spread his gifts right and left; the author rector (presumably Crabbe himself), whose delight was all in books, who shunned men and women alike, "and hurried homewards when his tasks were done"—all these incumbents are kindly drawn: but the last of all, the "Youth from Cambridge,"

"Who did much his sober hearers vex,  
Confound the simple and the sad perplex,"

is the only portrait in which he touches his usual jarring and painful string. This latest holder of the cure of souls is the impersonation of that type of religion which inspired Cowper, which, in the early fervour of Wesley and his coadjutors, had regenerated the country, stirring up and quickening religious life even among those most opposed to the new spirit, but which by this time had fallen into the fashion of the Evangelical party.

"Conviction comes like lightning, he would cry ;  
In vain you seek it, and in vain you fly ;  
'Tis like the rushing of the mighty wind,  
Unseen its progress but its power you find ;  
It strikes the child ere yet its reason wakes ;  
His reason fled, the ancient sire it shakes ;  
The proud, learn'd man, and him who loves to know  
How and from whence those gusts of grace will blow,  
It shuns,—but sinners in their way impedes,  
And sots and harlots visits in their deeds :  
Of faith and penance it supplies the place ;  
Assures the vilest that they live by grace,  
And, without running, makes them win the race.'  
Such was the doctrine our young prophet taught."

The conclusion of this sketch, in which the fervid preacher on his death-bed is smitten by compunctions as to "the good I've wrought," and the defilement of "his

moral rags," and alms-deeds, with the sexton's consolatory assurance—

"Your faith's your prop, nor have you pass'd such time  
In life's good-works as swell them to a crime,"

shows the calm ecclesiastic's disapproval of all highly wrought spiritual influence, as well as Crabbe's strong dislike to the Evangelicals, of whose teaching he gives so cruel a version. In the accompanying tale of "Sir Eustace Grey," an effort in a new direction and not a happy one, the climax of the madman's story is his conversion, which by the narrator of the tale is evidently intended to appear as mad as any of the delusions that have gone before. Crabbe was thus a world apart in religious feeling from the gentle recluse of Olney; as different as the self-commanded and thoroughly respectable parson was from the rustic rake and self-tormented penitent of Ayr and Dumfries. Good man! he had so much the better part of life, that he need not grudge the very different movement of the heart with which we turn to these two unfortunates, the favourites and the victims of life, whose miseries he escaped, though he shared in some degree their consecration.

GEORGE CRABBE, born 1754 : died 1832.

Published The Library, 1781.

The Village, 1783.

Parish Register, 1807.

The Borough, 1810.

Tales in Verse, 1812.

Tales of the Hall, 1819.

## CHAPTER V.

THE COTERIES BEFORE WORDSWORTH—THE SWAN OF  
LICHFIELD.

WHILE these new and altered voices gained day by day a wider hearing, it must not be forgotten that a great many relics of the former epoch were still surviving about the country, and that careful couplets were still being elaborated, and all the scaffolding of criticism which had been put up for the perfection and polishing of every monument of the Augustan age, still obscured the smaller erections, the Temples of the Muses, which adorned here and there an ambitious poet's garden or nobleman's park. If the coteries were dying out in London, where the old lion's roar grew feebler, and Bozzy had been led away into matrimony and Scotland, and the genial house of the Thrales was broken up, and all the society that waited upon Johnson's nod was dispersed or dispersing, the spirit which had animated them was still surviving in various favoured spots in the country where the learned and the witty congregated together, and a little centre of intellectual amusement and ambition, giving occupation and happiness to a great many gentle lives, was set up. One of these, of which we have the 'most admirable details, was established in Lichfield under the shadow of the palace. The gentle historian who has set it forth before our eyes is Anna Seward, herself a poet, according to all the estab-

lished requirements of the day, the correspondent of many of the most distinguished persons of the time, a delightful feminine pedant, with all the graces of the ending century. Her letters, and her life of Dr. Darwin, admit us with all due ceremony, yet friendliness, into the charmed circles round the Close of Lichfield, to all the tea-parties and the rural expeditions, the literary discussions and love-makings of the time.

Erasmus Darwin was the physician of this favoured circle. He was a man of boundless personal energy, a big, clumsy, stammering, witty and genial personage, with an "extreme scepticism as to human truth," great powers of sarcasm—but, withal, that largeness and impetuosity of character which so often insures popularity, and especially pleases women, to whom its vigour, and sweep, and speed, are delightful by contrast. It was not, however, only to the refined and critical ladies of the Close, but to the whole country round, that this lumbering doctor commended himself. He was very skilful in his profession, very benevolent and charitable, and apparently full, in deeds, of that regard for others which his words did not disclose. There is something in the description of him which recalls the other great native of Lichfield, who was by no means a favourite in his own country. Darwin, like Johnson, was ungainly, "his limbs too heavy for exact proportion: the traces of a severe small-pox: features and countenance which, when they were not animated by social pleasure, were rather saturnine than sprightly, a form inclined to corpulence, a stoop in the shoulders, and the then professional appendage, a full-bottomed wig," bring a figure before us very like that of the more memorable man, who satisfied his own extraordinary nature, so made up of nobleness and weakness, by the fine superstition of his penance in Lichfield market-place, where, as everybody knows, he stood bareheaded in

the rain, amid the staring spectators, to expiate a boyish disobedience. Perhaps just then the pretty young ladies from the Bishop's palace tripped by in their airy muslins, and wondered much to see the strange spectacle; or the other busy doctor, elbowing the crowd, pushed the gazers out of his way as he went on to his patients, and stammered scorn at the unlikely sentiment. "Mutual and strong dislike," Miss Seward tells us, "existed between them." In all Dr. Johnson's letters, dated from Lichfield, the name of Darwin is never mentioned, "nor indeed," the historian adds with dignified surprise, any of the ingenious and *lettered* people who lived there—while of its more common-life characters there is frequent mention, with many hints of Lichfield's intellectual barrenness—while it could boast a Darwin and other men of classical learning, poetic talents, and liberal information!" One of these was the writer's father, a canon of the cathedral, who had edited the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, besides writing verses, of which little record has been kept; but this was quite enough to make him a member of the literary class, and deeply sensitive to the fact of being passed over. "By people of literary taste and judgment," Miss Seward says, her father's work "is allowed to be the best commentary on those dramatic works which has appeared;" and "Shakspeare had few more spirited eulogists than Mr. Seward." Another of the Lichfield literati overlooked by the arrogant Johnson was Archdeacon Vyse, who was "not only a man of learning, but of Prioric talents in the metrical impromptu." "Gentle reader, behold an instance!" cries Miss Seward, and thereupon quotes a poem of nine long stanzas made upon a certain "fair Charlotte Lynes" at a convivial meeting of Lichfield gentlemen, *most of whom could make agreeable verses*. But though the flowers of poetry flourished there, thorns grew among them. These verses were

much read, admired, and copied. Mr. Vyse thought his fair Charlotte growing too vain in consequence, and once, when she was complimented on the subject, in a large company, he said smilingly—

“Charlotte the power of song can tell,  
For ’twas the ballad made the belle,”

which was not very chivalrous, nor even gentlemanly. “*These*,” adds Miss Seward, “were the men whose intellectual existence passed unnoticed by Dr. Johnson in his depreciating Estimate of Lichfield talents. But Johnson liked only *worshippers*.”

Anna herself was the flower and climax of all these wits. She was a beautiful girl, with a classical education, and the greatest “taste,” according to the tenets which still held fast hold of literary coteries, at once an accomplished writer of verses and the keenest of critics. Whenever she quotes, as she is fond of doing, a set of verses, her instinct of analysis is at once at work. As an example of the literary atmosphere before the winds blew away all these gentle mists of verbal play, we may quote Miss Seward’s comment upon one of her hero’s productions—an elegy of which we give only the verses discussed—

“Dread dream that, hovering in the midnight air,  
Clasped with thy dusky wing my aching head,  
While to imagination’s startled ear  
Toll’d the slow bell for bright Eliza, dead.

“Stretched on her sable bier the grave beside,  
A snow-white shroud her breathless bosom bound,  
On her wan brow the mimic lace was tied ;  
And Love and Virtue hung their garlands round.”

“The second verse” (says Miss Seward) “of this charming elegy affords an instance of Dr. Darwin’s too exclusive devotion to distinct picture in poetry : that it sometimes betrayed him into bringing objects so precisely to the eye, as to lose in such precision their power of striking forcibly upon the heart. The pathos in the second

verse is injured by the words 'mimic lace,' which allude to the perforated borders of the shroud. The expression is too minute for the solemnity of the subject. Certainly it cannot be proper for a shocked or agitated mind to observe or to describe with such petty accuracy. Besides, the allusion is not sufficiently obvious. The reader pauses to consider what the poet means by 'mimic lace.' Such pauses deaden sensation and break the course of attention. A friend of the doctor's pleaded strongly that the line might run thus—

“ ‘On her wan brow the *shadowy crape* was tied,’

but the alteration was rejected. Inattention to the rules of grammar in the first verse was also pointed out to him at the same time. The dream is addressed—

“ ‘Dread dream that clasped my aching head,’

but nothing is said to it, and therefore the sense is left unfinished, while the elegy proceeds to give a picture of the lifeless beauty. The same friend suggested a change which would have remedied the defect thus—

“ ‘Dread was the dream that in the midnight air  
Clasped with its dusky wing my aching head,  
While to,’ etc.

“Hence not only the grammatic error would have been done away, but the grating sound produced by the near alliteration of the harsh *dr* in 'dread dream' removed, by placing those words at a greater distance from each other. This alteration was for the same reason rejected. The doctor would not spare the word *hovering*, which he said strengthened the picture; but surely the image ought not to be elaborately precise, by which a dream is transformed into an animal with black wings.”

This will afford an example of the process going on over those verses, which now win here and there the attention of the student, but are carefully avoided by the general reader, who no longer is in the mood to be interested in “bright Eliza's” problematical shroud. Thus they talked while the tea-kettle simmered, and “Miss Pussy Po” purred at her mistress's feet. The beautiful old rooms in the palace were the home of taste and poetry and friendship; most of the gentle company there “could

make agreeable verses." Young Mr. Edgeworth, "a young and gay philosopher," and his eccentric friend Mr. Day, were drawn to Lichfield by the reputation of Dr. Darwin. Here also came "the Rev. Mr. Michell. He was skilled in astronomic science, modest and wise;" "The ingenious Mr. Kerr of West Bromwich; Mr. Boulton, known and respected wherever mechanic philosophy is understood; Mr. Watt, the celebrated improver of the steam-engine; and above all others . . . the accomplished Dr. Small of Birmingham."

Such was the doctor's private circle which Johnson scorned. Mr. Edgeworth and Mr. Day were the only ones specially honoured with notice from the palace. Of the former, we are told that "his address was gracefully spirited and his conversation eloquent; he danced, he fenced, and winged his arrows with more than philosophic skill." Besides these qualities he is known to fame as the father of "the great Maria," and to Lichfield as the husband of several wives, drawn from among her fairest: but Mr. Day was still more interesting. "He published in later years two noble poems, 'The Dying Negro' and 'The Devoted Legions': also 'Sandford and Merton,' which by wise parents is put into every youthful hand." A number of charming young women made up the company—all lovely, to judge from the enthusiastic descriptions of the historian, and herself and her pretty sister among the loveliest there. Sir Walter Scott, who saw Miss Seward only in old age, gives his testimony that she must have been "exquisitely beautiful." The Vale of Stowe lay at their feet, visible from the palace windows; and coming home from their walks and rides, the young people worshipped, whenever they came in sight of them, the three beautiful towers, called by one enthusiastic girl "the Ladies of the Valley," under shelter of which Anna the Muse, and pretty Sarah, who died at eighteen, and Honora



the adopted child, had grown into beauty and fascination. Young Major André, one of the most lamented victims of the American War, was a member of one of those cheerful groups, and many a poetic youth paid his homage. None of them, however, had so romantic a story as Day, whose adventures Miss Seward tells at length, and all his philosophical failures in life. Her description of him is worthy of quotation, if only to show the kind of pen-and-ink painting which was popular in these days.

"Powder and fine clothes were at that time the appendages of gentlemen. Mr. Day wore neither. He was tall, and stooped in his shoulders; full made, but not corpulent; and in his meditative and melancholy air a degree of awkwardness and dignity were blended. We found his features interesting and agreeable, through the traces of a severe small-pox. There was a sort of weight upon the lids of his large hazel eyes; yet when he declaimed

"Of good and evil  
Passion and apathy, and glory and shame,"

very expressive were the energies gleaming from them beneath the shade of sable hair, which, Adam-like, curled about his brows. . . . In the course of the year 1770 Mr. Day stood for a full-length picture to Mr. Wright of Derby. A strong likeness and a dignified portrait were the result. He stands, leaning his arm on a column inscribed to Hampden. Mr. Day looks upwards, as enthusiastically meditating on the contents of a book held in his dropped right hand. The open leaf is the oration of that virtuous patriot in the Senate against the grant of ship-money demanded by King Charles the First. A flash of lightning plays in Mr. Day's hair, and illuminates the contents of the volume. . . . Dr. Darwin sat to Mr. Wright about the same period. *That* was a simply contemplative portrait of the most perfect resemblance."

Dr. Darwin was not so attractive as this unlucky philosopher, whose freak of training a perfect wife for himself is so well known, and was so unsuccessful. Miss Seward gives the whole story of it, and describes "the beauteous Sabrina," a foundling girl whom he brought to Lichfield, in order to train her into an epitome of all the

virtues, as an object of great interest to the ladies in the palace. When his experiment failed, he discovered that Honora Sneyd, the beautiful girl who was the adopted child of Canon Seward, and the darling of his house, was everything his fancy had painted. But Honora, whom André had adored, would have nothing to say to the philosopher, nor would her sister, to whom he afterwards transferred his affections. Even before the episode of the beautiful Sabrina, this original had been jilted, and had written "a beautiful elegy," in half-a-hundred verses, upon his evil fate. Thus, finding in every event an occasion for more stanzas, or for a flood of carefully polished couplets, to be subjected to all the criticisms of the coterie, these poetical people went through life consoling themselves with literature amid all its harsher realities. No doubt the Muse helped Mr. Day through the many vicissitudes of his sentimental career. Nor were these the only poets of the society. Mr. John Gisborne, who wrote "The Vales of Weaver;" Mr. Munday, whose poem upon "Needwood Forest," printed for private circulation only, "one of the most beautiful *local* poems that has been written," as the enthusiastic historian informs us, she presented to Sir Walter Scott at the very end of her life as a distinguished token of friendship; Sir Brooke Boothby, whose claims do not seem to be founded upon any special production, and many more, fluttered round the two central figures, those of clumsy Dr. Darwin and the beautiful Muse of the Close. She has a great enthusiasm for all those now unknown sons of genius. The effusions of Mr. John Gisborne are such, she thinks, that it "would disgrace the national taste if they should be suffered to pass away without their fame;" and in order to ensure them some share of it, she quotes at great length from this "efflorescence of a rich imagination" such verses as the following:—

“As the sonorous North assails  
Weaver’s bleak hills and leafless vales,  
With awful majesty of night,  
He bursts the billowy clouds of night;  
Booms the resounding glens among,  
And, roaring, rolls his snows along.”

Miss Seward puts a footnote to the word “booms.” “A word,” she cries, “admirably expressing the noise of winds, and applied to it here for the first time in poetry.” What a delightful fund of occupation for a gentle unemployed life must have been given by those prolonged commentaries! Better even than those labours of the needle—

“The well-depicted flower  
Wrought patiently into the snowy lawn,”

for which “the Swan of Lichfield” (which was this charming young woman’s poetical title) was equally distinguished.

Miss Seward’s own poetical efforts were begun very early; she played with the muse from her childhood. “At first,” she says in one of her letters, “my father encouraged it.” He was himself a poet, as well as the editor and critic of the old dramatists. “But my mother threw cold water on the rising fires,” she adds; “and even my father ceased to smile encouragement upon these attempts after my sixteenth birthday, in which Dr. Darwin unluckily told him that his daughter’s verses were better than his—a piece of arch injustice to my father’s muse which disgusted him with mine.” These little minstrels, it is evident, were very touchy and jealous of their respective degrees of excellence. After this early suppression, however—but how long after we are not informed—the famous rites at Batheaston, where another poetical coterie existed under the auspices of a certain Lady Miller, developed and introduced to “the world,”

such as that world was, the elegant strains of the jealous canon's daughter. The Batheaston celebration was held periodically (once a week, we think, while the season lasted), and all the elegant visitors of the Bath who had the honour of Lady Miller's acquaintance drove over to this highly superior kind of garden party. Miss Austen, we presume, was not old enough to have taken part in it, or certainly Catherine Morland, with her wide-open eyes, would have had an invitation, and gazed at all the poets and poetesses. When the fine company had assembled, the competing poems, which had been put into an "Etruscan vase," were drawn forth in succession by the judges, and read aloud, to the delight of all those persons of taste. Among Miss Seward's collected works there are a great many elegies and monodies headed "Prize poem at Batheaston;" and Miss Burney gives a lively account of the ceremonial in her diary. These celebrations emancipated Anna from the cold shade of domestic repression, and by this time, no doubt, the Swan of Lichfield had grown old enough to have her own way. There is a very pathetic story of the death of her sister Sarah at nineteen, on the eve of her marriage, which no doubt made the will and wishes of Anna of double importance in the bereaved house. Pretty glimpses of a generous and impulsive young woman appear even through the antiquated graces of her narrative. Lady Northesk, an interesting stranger dying of consumption, stopped at Lichfield on her way to the north to consult the doctor, whose fame was great in all the country round; and it occurred to Dr. Darwin that hers was a case in which that romantic remedy transfusion of blood, so seldom heard of except in novels, might be efficacious. Miss Seward immediately offered her own lily-white arm as the fountain of new life to the new friend whom she had taken up with romantic fervour. "My health is perfect.

neither am I conscious of any lurking disease, hereditary or accidental. I have no dread of the lancet, and will gladly spare from time to time such a portion from my veins to Lady Northesk as Dr. Darwin shall think proper." When things had come so far as this, however, the poetical doctor drew back, alarmed by the risk, alleging the difficulty of "the construction of a proper machine" for the injection. But Lady Northesk never forgot the generous offer; and it gives us a pleasant picture of the enthusiastic girl, to whom Friendship, celebrated in a thousand verses, was the most sacred of ties.

Here, however, we see the two poets, the doctor and the maiden, in a still more poetical combination.

"About the year 1777, Dr. Darwin purchased a little wild umbrageous valley, a mile from Lichfield, amongst the only rocks which border that city so nearly. It was irriguous from various springs, and swampy from their plenitude. One of its native features had long excited the attention of the curious—a rock, which in the central depths of the glen drops perpetually about three times in a minute. Aquatic plants border its top and branch from its fissures; no length of summer drouth abates, no rains increase, its humidity; no frost congeals its droppings. The doctor cultivated this spot, 'and paradise was opened in the wild.' Not only with trees of various growth did he adorn the borders of the fountain, the brook, and the lakes, but with various classes of plants, uniting the Linnæan science with the charm of landscape. For the Naiad of the fountain he wrote the following inscription:—

SPEECH OF A WATER NYMPH.

" ' If the meek flower, of bashful dye,  
Attract not thy incurious eye—  
If the soft murmuring rill to rest  
Enchain not thy tumultuous breast—  
Go where ambition lures the vain,  
Or avarice barters peace for gain !'

"Dr. Darwin restrained his friend Miss Seward's steps to this her always favourite scene, till it had assumed its new beauties from

cultivation. He purposed accompanying her on her first visit to his botanic garden, but a medical summons from the country deprived her of that pleasure. She took her tablets and pencil, and, seated on a flower-bank in the midst of that luxuriant retreat, wrote the following lines while the sun was gilding the glen, and while birds of every plume poured their song from the boughs."

The reader would like to see the verses thus poetically composed; but he is not very likely, save with some research and trouble, to find them in the three long volumes of poetry which Miss Seward left behind her, or even in their illegitimate place where they stand at the head of the "Botanic Garden," which is Dr. Darwin's chief title to poetic fame—so we may be excused if we quote from them here. After an address to "ye proud," whom the gentle poet adjures to "come not here," the true favourite of the muses is thus invited:—

"But thou, whose mind the well-tempered ray  
Of Taste and Virtue lights with purer day,  
Whose finer sense each soft vibration owns  
Mute and unfeeling to discorded tones;  
Like the fair flower that spreads its lucid form  
To meet the sun, but shuts it to the storm:  
For thee my borders nurse the glowing wreath,  
My fountains murmur, and my zephyrs breathe,  
My painted birds their vivid plumes unfold,  
And insect armies wave their wings of gold.

"And if with thee some hapless maid should stray,  
Disastrous love companion of her way,  
O! lead her timid step to yonder glade,  
Whose weeping rock recumbent alders shade,  
There as meek Evening wakes the temperate breeze,  
And moonbeams glimmer through the trembling trees,  
The rills that gurgle round shall soothe her ear,  
The weeping rock shall number tear for tear;  
And as sad Philomel, alike forlorn,  
Sings to the night reclining on her thorn,  
While at sweet intervals each falling note  
Sighs in the gale and whispers round the grot,

The sister-woe shall calm her aching breast,  
And softest slumbers steal her cares to rest.

“Thus spoke the Genius as he slept along,  
And bade these lawns to Peace and Truth belong.”

“By the genius of the place is meant its first cultivator, Dr. Darwin,” Miss Seward adds in a footnote. When she gave her poem to the doctor, he “seemed pleased with it,” and suggested the “Linnæan System” as “a happy subject for the Muse.” “I will write the notes, which must be scientific,” he said, “and you shall write the verse.” Miss Seward, however, demurred. She did not think that the plan was “strictly proper for a female pen,” probably because of those loves of the plants which bore so large a share in it; but “she felt how eminently it was adapted to the efflorescence of his own fancy.”

This was how the “Botanic Garden,” that “magnificent poem,” a work which, according to Miss Seward, “forms a new class in poetry, and by so doing gives to the British Parnassus a wider extent than it possessed in Greece or in ancient or modern Rome;” a poem that, “if poetic taste is not much degenerated, will live as long as the *Metamorphosis*,” which “must endure so long as the English language shall exist; nay, should that perish, translation would preserve the ‘Botanic Garden’ as one of its gems”—came into being. Few readers of the present day will have so much as seen this lengthy and elaborate production. It was published (or at least part of it) in 1781, just about the time when Crabbe was making his first essay. The second part, however, was not given to the world till after the three great new poets whom we have already treated had fully occupied the ear of the world. And yet with that contrast in existence, and the new life coming in so strongly, the “Botanic Garden” was a successful and popular work. Darwin

was paid £900 for it, which is one test of its excellence. The doctor, however, though so fine a poet, was not a very scrupulous man. He took those elegant lines which Miss Seward, seated on a bank of flowers, and taking out her tablets and pencil, had written for him, and made them, without any acknowledgment, the introduction to his poem. They are quoted as a specimen of his poetical style in Chambers's excellent *Cyclopædia of Literature*. The gentle Muse of Lichfield is very moderate and very dignified in all she says on the subject—nevertheless there is a touch of indignation in the tone with which she reclaims her property.

Such an appropriation is not much in keeping with the big and rude and burly image, in itself very unlike that of a poet, which is developed with no small power in Miss Seward's memoir. It is a pity she had not left poetry alone, and given us more of those graphic if high-flown descriptions—but the sentimental flood of her letters is too washy to be waded through in search of other gems of this kind. She was complimented in her turn by Darwin, who owed her so many compliments, as the inventress of epic elegy—and by Hayley, the biographer of Cowper, himself a songster of the same order, and cultivating poetry and taste among his neighbours in a similar way. He describes "the Muse of Elegy" in a poetical tribute addressed to her.

"Speaking to earth the kind enthusiast came,  
And veil'd her heavenly power with SEWARD's name,"

while all that listen to her strains

"Bless the enchanting lyre, by glory strung,  
Envyng the dead who are so sweetly sung."

Miss Seward, however, does not claim any unrivalled power for herself even in this special vein. "Many excel



me in writing verse," she says with dignified modesty, "perhaps scarcely one in the vivid and strong sensibility of its excellence, or in the ability to estimate its claims." It is her strong sense of this "ability to estimate" the claims of genius which makes her criticisms so bold and gives her praise such a triumphant certainty. An amusing proof of her confidence in her own powers is given in one of her letters, in which she takes it upon herself to improve the prose style of (of all people in the world) Addison, informing a correspondent that "you will find the words in italics which strike me as forming the inelegance of Addison's style, and you will perceive that words within hooks constitute its redundance." Her discrimination is more perceptible when she upholds the cause of a new poet against the old. "When," she says, "with avowed delight in the poetic powers of Cowper's 'Task,' the writer of these strictures, in conversation with Dr. Darwin and Sir Brooke Boothby, asked their opinion of that poem, each declared they could not read it through; each taxed it with egotism, with prosaicism, with a rough and slovenly style, and with utter want of regular design."

Such were the ways of judging and the methods of criticism current among the old school. Miss Seward thinks that it was "the jealous spirit of authorism" which "darkened the candour" of her doctor. But as she tells us shortly after that he "had ever maintained a preference of Akenside's blank verse to Milton's; declared that it was of higher polish, of more chaste purity, and more dignified construction," we may be permitted to doubt his critical judgment, without even her charitable supposition that his "taste" was somewhat enervated by too much refinement. Refinement, indeed, except in verse, does not seem to have been Dr. Darwin's quality, and the velvet pile of his poetry sits oddly enough upon the homespun of his character, to use a congenial simile.

The curious link of connection between the opinions which this scientific manufacturer of rhymes had begun to hold and express in the end of last century; and those which have made his descendant remarkable in this, is very interesting to the imagination; and we wish Erasmus Darwin had been a little more heroic. One or two incidents, however, of an interesting kind, are related of the energetic doctor. The elegy to "bright Eliza," which we find criticised so closely, was conceived if not written while Dr. Darwin was in attendance upon the lady, who afterwards became his wife. She was at the moment the wife of another man, but that had not hindered some passionate expressions of poetical devotion. The lady had been seized with violent fever, and the doctor was sent for. "Not being requested to continue in the house through the ensuing night, which he apprehended might prove critical, he passed the remaining hours till day-dawn beneath a tree opposite her apartment, watching the passing and repassing lights in the chamber. During the period in which a life he so passionately valued was in danger, he paraphrased Petrarch's celebrated sonnet, narrating a dream whose prophecy was accomplished by the death of Laura." The idea of this he afterwards extended into the elegy. However, that *nuit blanche* under the tree, of the stout, stammering, hard-headed, unbelieving doctor, a middle-aged widower, under the windows of another man's wife, has a sort of grotesque romance, all unlike his artificial and elaborate strains, which touches the heart a little, though it is difficult at the same time to refrain from a smile. We feel that Miss Seward, knowing the circumstances, should not have been so hard on the *dread dream*; but then perhaps she did not think the lady worth all that trouble; and certainly it was very improper on the part of the doctor.

To balance the romance we have a semi-heroic nar-

rative of a certain occasion on which Dr. Darwin, who, as a rule, eschewed all intoxicating liquors, was persuaded to drink more wine than was good for him. It was while on a boating expedition, and in the middle of a hot mid-summer day. To the horror and astonishment of his friends, the half-intoxicated doctor suddenly plunged out of the boat into the river, when they were close to Nottingham, and rushing in his wet clothes across the fields, reached the market-place before they could overtake him. Here they found him mounted on a tub, making an oration to the gaping multitude around. "Ye men of Nottingham, listen to me," he said. "You are ingenious and industrious mechanics. By your industry, life's comforts are procured for yourselves and families. If you lose your health, the power of being industrious will forsake you, *that* you know: but you may not know that to breathe fresh and changed air constantly is not less necessary to procure health than sobriety itself. Air becomes unwholesome in a few hours if the windows are shut. . . . I have no *interest* in giving you this advice. Remember what I, your countryman and a physician, tell you. If you would not bring infection and disease upon yourselves, and to your wives and little ones, change the air you breathe; change it many times a day by opening your windows."

After which abrupt address he got down from his tub, and went back with his friends to their boat. The dripping philosopher on his homely platform, the gaping crowd about him, an eager apothecary of his acquaintance vainly endeavouring to persuade him to come home with him and change his wet clothes, and the astounded excursionists standing by not knowing what to make of their friend's vagary, form an amusing picture. He was before his age so far as regards sanitary conditions, it is evident: poetry is a different matter.

But the Lichfield coterie altogether gives us a quaint and amusing picture of the little literary societies spread over the face of the country, where Taste was set up as the tutelary spirit, and Criticism of the minutest carefulness, serious as if the fate of empires hung upon her decisions, pondered every line, and "most of the gentlemen," not to say the ladies also, "could make agreeable verses." Lady Miller at Bathaston was, as has been said, the presiding genius of another of these refined circles. And there was Hayley in Sussex, in that landscape which Cowper found too mountainous and exciting, with Mrs. Charlotte Smith in her cottage near, who would come and read them her romances till the little circle thrilled with interest, and counted the hours from evening to evening, that they might trace a little further the history of Celestina or Louisa. They were all devoted to Nature, these clever people, and never tired of describing her. She was to them a benevolent and lovely old princess, clothed in embroideries and ornamented with countless jewels. They patronised her, and went to her for consolation as they would have gone to any other old queen of society who was benignant as well as splendid. Their intercourse with her was a sort of continuous *fête champêtre*, at which she was hostess, giving them tea and smiles, patting them on the shoulders when they were melancholy. She had little to say to the common herd, but for her favourites was there ever so amiable, so tender a dowager? They could not sufficiently exclaim to themselves and each other how delightful she was, how sweet and kind. Miss Seward was, so to speak, a maid of honour, or Lady High Chamberlain to this beautiful old queen: and Dr. Darwin, if not a court physician, was at least so scientifically devoted to her court robes and the handsome appearance and value of her surroundings, that he too was entitled to her most bewitching smile.

But all this is very different from the atmosphere which now fills our heavens and earth. It is the prettiest possible side of the old *régime* which was ending. Except that now and then some one died or was crossed in love, there seems little sign of earthly ills or passions in that flowery city, surrounded by such soft distances, and crowned by the "Ladies of the Valley," the three towers where old art and heavenly music and religion had their mysterious throne. Art, it is true, as represented by a Gothic cathedral was held in but little store, and religion, save in sentiment, was kept carefully in her right place; but yet the towers were dear from association, and enhanced the attractions of that sweet old goddess who dwelt outside the town, growing innumerable banks of flowers, and ready at any moment to have all her minstrels and all their admirers out to tea.

ANNA SEWARD, born 1747 ; died 1809.

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ERASMUS DARWIN, born 1731 ; died 1802.

Published Botanic Garden in 1781.

Loves of the Plants in 1789.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE NEW BROTHERHOOD.

WHEN the face of English literature had been thus changed, the old follies put to flight and the new life brought in, with a tremulous ecstasy and universal quiver of emotion and movement, the time came for that new flood of genius which is the distinction of our own day. It is true that at least two generations have come and gone over the earth since Wordsworth and his brother poets were first revealed. But they all lived well into our own century, and they belong to a condition of things entirely altered from those which influenced the former epoch. Our living poets are their legitimate and unquestioned descendants, and the Age which they have made illustrious is as yet scarcely completed; so that we are justified in calling this last great era of poetical history our own time. Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge in one group; Byron, Shelley, and Keats in another; Scott—an army in himself; and various smaller but still remarkable figures, came all together, as splendid a band as has ever breathed the same air—rivals, coadjutors, fellow-workmen, perfecting a new system and establishing a new reign. Into these mingled voices Crabbe lived long to add his harsh yet effective tone. But the other Precursors had disappeared in the wilderness through which they had hewed out for their successors so wonderful a path.

Burns remained a power and inspiration among the new race, affecting even the sober and dignified mind of Wordsworth as one of the most living of influences; but Cowper, who is so much less forcible and commanding a figure, and in whom there was no energy of passion to keep hold of the imagination of his heirs and successors, would seem to have passed away from their recollection altogether. So far as the new school of poets was concerned his mission was little acknowledged, notwithstanding that his poetical inheritance fell, like so much else that was rich and rare, into the hands of the immortal Dalesman, the poet of those wide atmospheres and silent skies, which in so different a form had breathed life into the invalid upon the banks of the fat and languid Ouse.

It is difficult to understand by what quaint and arbitrary link of association the three friends, who were to forge between them the next links in the poetical chain, got to be called the Lake poets—or rather got to be joined in so close a fellowship that their names cling together inevitably like a line in a beadroll. There was so little real affinity between the serious, almost solemn, manhood and musing genius of Wordsworth, the mystical and wayward spirit of Coleridge, and the virtuous precision and hard-working faculty of Southey, that they might have founded three different schools, instead of, by obstinate fiction, being held to represent but one. However, it is too late now to attempt to disturb the classification which lasted all their lives, notwithstanding that even their appreciation of each other, so enthusiastic and generous in youth, waned with the progress of the years.

The first appearance of this new group to mortal view is in the brisk and somewhat impertinent pages of Mr. Joseph Cottle, a bookseller in Bristol, himself one of the old race of local versemakers, and in his way a homely

Mæccenas, always ready with a good deal of enthusiasm and a small sum of money, both of which things were greatly in request among the penniless but ardent youths. Bristol, too, was one of the centres of lively and artificial literary life, so many of which were at that time in existence. The presiding genius, however, was of a sterner kind than the Swan of Lichfield. Hannah More, surrounded by her admiring sisters, was the ornament and pride of the neighbouring country, and though it would not seem that Southey, a native of Bristol, had attracted her notice, yet Mr. Cottle had permission to conduct any friend of his to an audience of the great woman of letters, whom all the fine personages in the country came to worship, and who had recently evolved a poet out of her milkwoman—though this is scarcely respectful to Anne Yearsley, who, though a prodigy and subject to the fate of such, had considerable power of versification and much poetical feeling, and was worthy of a better fate. Mr. Cottle himself was a poet, and so was his brother Amos,<sup>1</sup> who died young, and whose portrait the good man published along with those of the great Three whom he was instrumental in introducing to the world. His complacent and confused gossip is not to be compared with the more dignified narratives of the lives of the poets, but it is not without some power of portraiture, and it brings the young men before us in a group, a sort of rude fresco-painting, such as is sometimes more effective than a finer work of art. Southey and Coleridge were introduced to him by Robert Lovell, their friend and associate, “a young Quaker,” who was also a kind of a poet (indeed in Bristol, as in Lichfield, most of the gentlemen seem to have made agreeable verses), and

<sup>1</sup> “ Oh Amos Cottle ! Phœbus, what a name  
To fill the speaking trump of future fame ! ”

Byron's *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*.



who communicated to the mind of Cottle something of his own admiration for his gifted friends, one of whom came from Cambridge, and the other from Oxford, in itself an argument for respect. They had both, however, broken off their college career abruptly, leaving their Universities without degrees, and the lives of each had already been tinged with adventure. Southey, the most perfectly well conducted of young men, had been expelled from Westminster school for overbold speech in a school-boy newspaper. Coleridge, for some purely fantastic motive, had enlisted in a cavalry regiment, and spent some months under that curious discipline, not without enjoyment. Now, the two had got a fancy in their heads, struck out somehow between the dreamy but inexhaustible invention of the one and the romantico-practical imagination of the other, of emigrating to America with a few chosen friends, and setting up a new Utopia—a dream-colony of Apostolic freedom and equality, where every worldly possession should be in common, and idyllic peace and plenty and love should reign. Lovell, the young Quaker, was one of the brethren: vowed to this enterprise, looking forward to it with eager excitement; and, mad as the scheme appears to us, it would seem to have had some air of possibility at the moment, since Southey's mother and her family intended to join the expedition, and for some time the minds of an anxious circle of people were occupied with it. They met in Bristol apparently with some remote intention of sailing from that place, if Providence would but send them a little money with which to buy agricultural implements and pay their passage-money. And there were other inducements. Lovell was already married to a Miss Fricker of Bristol, to one of whose sisters Southey was engaged; and Coleridge lost no time in falling in love with a third. The Pantisocracy, which was to be

the name of their society, exacted marriage, and this was about the only practical step the brethren took to carry its requirements out.

Such was the group which suddenly gathered in the path of the excellent Mr. Cottle, surprising him into such mingled emotions of complacency and reverence as fill his gossiping book with their reflection still. He had the discrimination to perceive that these were poets far exceeding any faculty of his, but he felt at the same time the benign superiority of money, giving him an advantage over them, which he was generously willing to use for their good. They were penniless, though their plans were so magnificent, and their little stock-in-trade was an unsaleable article, which the ordinary merchants in literary commodities would not buy. Indeed, it was only one of them who had any stock-in-trade at all; Coleridge's few poems were not half important enough for publication, and Mr. Cottle was somewhat of a wizard to detect the genius of which there was as yet so little proof. But what an importation of life and hope this little band brought into the old Bristol streets! Young Southey holding his handsome head high; young Coleridge with all the mystic future in his big dreamy eyes, and his mouth full of endless projects, one rising out of another like flowers from a stem; the first a refined and chivalrous gentleman at all times; the other an enchanter whose eloquence no man could withstand. To hear them talk of the new world that lay before them, the visionary society they were to form, the "undivided vale" by the side of the Susquehanna—soft-syllabled stream, which no doubt must flow like its name, and was chosen for that exquisite reason—in which their home was to rise, the conditions of the paradisiacal life they were to lead there—could any poem be more delightful? By the gravest calculations, they had made out that two hours a

day would suffice to get their daily bread out of that fertile poetical soil, and the rest of the time would be for poetry, for love, for endless talk, for books and the contemplation of nature: what matter that in the meantime, but for Mr. Cottle, it would have been difficult to pay their lodgings? All such sordid troubles would be over if once they could but reach that Land of Promise. Southey had Joan of Arc almost ready, which, "should the publication be anyways successful," would be enough, he thought, "to carry me over, and get me some few acres, a spade, and a plough." Coleridge had not even so much as that to trust to, but expected the spade, the plough, and the passage-money to drop down upon him from the genial skies.

In this strait Cottle came to the rescue nobly. He offered Coleridge thirty guineas for a volume of poetry yet to be written, and the same to Southey; while he undertook, at the same time, to give fifty pounds for "Joan of Arc"—altogether a romantic liberality which no sane publisher, who had not been at the same time a poet-worshipper and possessed of the gift of divination, could have ventured on. And the young men helped themselves on by delivering lectures, of which some, we cannot help suspecting, never came further than the prospectus; for it is difficult to imagine how Coleridge, at such a moment, could lecture upon the French Revolution, at that period in full and feverish career, contrasting it with the great Rebellion, without raising more excitement than was tolerable among the people of Bristol. For the subject was not one which either side took calmly, and the two young poets, it need scarcely be said, were wildly enthusiastic on the side of Freedom and the French, and lost no opportunity, poetical or otherwise, of denouncing all action on the part of England against them, and cursing, in good round oaths, all the demon-

powers who were uniting together to crush France and the new-born liberty which from her they hoped was to extend to all mankind. Southey turned out in later days the best of High Tories; and Coleridge, though he made so many fierce onslaughts upon Mr. Pitt in his belligerent days, was not of a spirit adapted for political partisanship. (But at this early period they were all aflame for the great cause of Freedom—their enthusiasm unquenched even by the blood and carnage of the Reign of Terror. It was their opinion that all existing governments, and that of England above all, were rotten at the core; and their Pantisocracy, their ideal city, was not only a refuge for their own souls from the evil of the times, but intended to be a tremendous protest against England, in which her philosophical sons no longer found it possible to live.

The earlier career of these two visionaries (of whom the elder was but twenty-two) had been simple enough. Southey's progenitors and relations were people with some pretensions to gentility; and his own life, his parents being poor, had been spent under the protection of an eccentric aunt, whose house was his home, and of a benevolent absent uncle, who had undertaken the expense of his education. The aunt, Miss Tyler, had been kept as long as possible in ignorance of the two great anticipations of her nephew's life, his intended emigration and marriage, and when she made the discovery her indignation and resentment were so great that Southey had to quit her house in the midst of a storm of rain, and to walk from Bristol to Bath, where his mother was: nor did he ever see the protector of his childhood again. This sudden abandonment threw him with double fervour into the brotherhood, already so close and intimate: he describes his condition as follows, with youthful grandiloquence, to the faithful friend, Grosvenor Bedford, who was

the constant confidant of his troubles and joys, both now and during all his life :—

“There is the strangest mixture of cloud and sunshine. An outcast in the world, an adventurer living by his wits, yet happy in the full conviction of rectitude, in integrity, and in the affection of a mild and lovely woman ; at once the object of hatred and admiration, wondered at by all, hated by the aristocrats—the very oracle of my own party ! . . . Do not grieve that circumstances have made me thus ; you ought to rejoice that your friend acts up to his principles, though you think them wrong. Coleridge is writing at this same table ; our names are written in the book of destiny, on the same page.”

One of the joint projects of the two youths, thus united by fate, was the publication of a magazine, “ which we can undoubtedly make the best thing of the kind ever published ;” but this did not at the moment come to anything. They had, indeed, a hundred plans ; and that part of their time which was not devoted to schemes of intellectual advancement was devoted to love-making and projects of another kind. “If Coleridge and I can get £150 *between us*, we propose marrying and retiring into the country, as our literary business can be carried on there, and practising agriculture, till we can raise the money for America, still the grand object in view,” Southey says. It was the fashion of this age of friendships that the young poets should publish their productions jointly, two or three in one volume ; and Coleridge went even farther than this, actually writing a portion of the “Joan of Arc,” which was his friend’s mainstay. Nevertheless clouds soon began to arise between them ; the Pantisocracy grew doubtful to Southey very soon after he had spoken of it as “still the grand object in view.” But it was the return of his ‘uncle, Mr. Hill, the consular chaplain at Lisbon, which finally removed him from the agitated but delightful little society in Bristol. This kind relative had maintained him at school and college in

the hope that his education would terminate decorously in orders and a good living. His after life proved that no career could have suited him better; but at this tumultuous period, when all the world was still seething with the strong excitement of the great Revolution, and all kinds of volcanic impulses were agitating young minds, he had no toleration for such an idea. Perhaps it is unjust to say, though Southey's son does not hesitate to say it, that his political views were such as "rarely fail to produce lax and dangerous views in religion;" but at least it is true enough that the tremendous innovations in politics which were being worked out in France, and which had startled all Europe and stirred up every lingering doubt and question everywhere, gave double force to those instinctive rebellions and resistances which seem to be inherent in youth; and that the mere idea of authority, and of a settled and long-established order, was enough to turn aside the excited minds of the generation, which hoped for nothing less than new heavens and a new earth. Southey felt in this moment of ebullition,—he, the predestined churchman, the man of duty and obligation, born to re-adopt and cling to all the loyal prejudices of a conservative race,—that to take the vows of the Church upon him would be "perjury." Before leaving Oxford he had tried medicine, but shrank from the special studies of that grand but terrible profession with the sickening horror of an extremely sensitive mind and nature. The only profession that remained was the law, which he hated scarcely less; but he was reasonable even in the wildness of his youth, and felt that when it became necessary to meet his uncle some feasible way of turning his education to account must be settled upon. Mr. Hill came to England in the autumn of 1795. He was the only member of his family, now that his aunt was entirely alienated from him, who could be of any

use to the young man, and his coming seems to have been looked for with natural anxiety and alarm. "Suspense shall be the subject of my tragedy," Southey cries on one occasion; "indeed I have often the heartache." But when the uncle came the youthful rebel was met with no reproaches. Mr. Hill was kind and judicious, and never seems to have abandoned the blameless youth, whose very vagaries were virtuous. The only thing he insisted upon was that his nephew should go back with him to Lisbon for several months—one of those most, natural and common domestic artifices by which imprudent attachments and objectionable associates are to be got rid of, as it is always hoped. No doubt the excellent chaplain, skilled in the fickle mind of youth, believed that all this effervescence of early folly would blow off (as it did, but not so easily), and that the change and novelty would soon empty his nephew's heart of the ineligible Edith and the unlucky "Muse."

It is curiously characteristic of Southey, who is the embodiment of the romantic-practical amid the vaguer poetical spirits of his brethren, that he should have taken a step which balked the good uncle's incipient plans before they had begun to be carried into execution. On the very day of his departure he married Edith Fricker. They parted at the church door—the bridegroom going off upon his travels, the bride, with her wedding-ring suspended by a ribbon round her neck, to the house of Cottle, always kind. "Never did man stand at the altar with such strange feelings," Southey says. "She returned the pressure of my hand, and we parted in silence." It was the maddest imprudence, for even the marriage-fees and ring were paid with Cottle's money; yet there was the ring of the true mettle, the energy and life of a manly mind even in its folly—and of something better still, of the noble instincts of that supporting and protecting love

of which he was an embodiment all his life. It is evident that the Frickers were very poor. By marrying Edith, Southey made a provision for her instantly possible. When he had anything himself, he could share it with her according to the rights given him by that hurried ceremony; and "should I perish by shipwreck, or any other casualty," he says, "I have relations whose prejudices would then yield to the anguish of affection, and who would love and cherish and yield all possible consolation to my widow." This gives to the high-flown folly of the secret wedding a consecration and an excuse. Not only to Edith, the mild and lovely, but to all her family, the wives of the other Pantisocrats and poets, Southey was henceforth the fountain of succour and life.

"Joan of Arc" was published just as he sailed away, dull and wretched, hating the voyage, and not without a certain nervous apprehension of its physical risks. He had got fifty guineas for the poem from good Cottle, and indeed we think this was quite as much as it was worth. The mission of the peasant prophetess—revolt made into duty by religion and a commission from heaven—was the kind of subject above all others to suit his mind and creed; for, whatever wild ideas might possess him, his imagination was fundamentally religious, and the romantic traditions of the past had not ceased to affect his fancy, though his mind was penetrated by the brilliant hopes and fallacies of the moment. It suited Southey, therefore, to show how redemption came from the poor, the ignorant, and lowly, how the heart of genius was stirred by the sight of the oppressed and slaughtered peasants, the young bridegroom, the father of little children, the widow's son, all sacrificed in odious war, while kings and nobles trifled and quarrelled, and let the humble masses pay for it with their blood. And the noble, pure, unworldly, Shepherd-Maiden, what poet is there who has



not felt the fascination of her appearance amid all the dismal records of the wars? But Joan has not brought luck to her poets. The painful length of the tale, the long discourses put in, with a mistake which is so common in narrative poetry, just at the moment when action and not discourse is imperative, the turgid heaviness of these long-winded discourses themselves, the mingled and disordered romantic machinery which twists in two or three episodes of ordinary love-making with the course of the grander history, make the poem almost unreadable now. We do not know, indeed, who but a student would attempt it. "Wat Tyler," the curious little revolutionary sketch which Southey had written at a still earlier age, and which he was compelled to publish by the malice of ungenial critics, when he had altogether changed his opinions, has much more spirit and nature in it.

Coleridge had been trained in a harder school. Though he spoke with great tenderness of his family, he seems to have been singularly abandoned by them from his boyhood up. He was brought up at Christ's Hospital, working his way through hardships and miseries which it is painful to contemplate, and was sent to Cambridge afterwards, against his will, the visionary boy with his multitudinous thoughts being too lawless and too individual to estimate the advantages of scholarship and classical education, though no scholar ever loved better the lore itself. At the University he had begun by gaining distinctions of the usual academic kind; but tiring suddenly of this adoption of other men's ways, or moved by pure waywardness and a desire to try a new order of known conditions, he went off in the midst of his career to London and enlisted in a cavalry regiment, calling himself Silas Titus Comberback, with boyish humour, yet loyal adherence to the "Es-tee-se" which had been his baby nickname. In his regiment, if we may trust

Mr. Cottle, he entered with all the large sympathy that belonged to him into the new life so ill suited to his nature, and bewitched the troopers, as he did every company into which he ever drifted afterwards, with his golden mouth, his boundless interest in life, his power of interesting others, and his marvellous wealth of words. This strangest of freaks did not last very long, though authorities are divided as to how he got out of it: whether by the aid of his officers after an involuntary exhibition of learning, or in a still simpler way by the interference of his family, to whom his whereabouts was revealed by an acquaintance who met him accidentally. Of one thing we may be quite sure, that if this extraordinary sentry did hear an officer make an erroneous quotation, he would correct him without more ado, and probably discourse to him on the meaning of the passage, and all Euripides intended to put into it, with illustrations from the entire range of the Greek drama. The existence of a couple of young subalterns likely to quote Euripides to each other is, however, more unlikely.

After this escapade Coleridge returned for a time to Cambridge, then bethought him of Pantisocracy as a cure for all the ills of life, and wonderful provision for its future blessedness; and having the idea confirmed and strengthened in his mind by the faith and zeal of his disciples, expatiated upon it and enlarged it, till the liquid flowing Susquehannah became something real to him, and the colony in Bristol was as if it had already gotten to the other side. It was much the same to him, nay, perhaps better, to have it there in glowing theory,—theory far more perfect than any execution,—than to take the actual steps necessary for its transportation. But to Southey this was not equally satisfactory. The way in which these two appear in Mr. Cottle's book is very curious. Though he cannot help having a certain

contempt for them, yet he had the greatest reverence for them. Coleridge, in particular, was a kind of inspired idiot to the bookseller. Southey's absurdity was not much more than was inevitable to youth; but Coleridge was the very type of that wonderful fool yet sage, that lamentable yet ineffable being with whom genius, and especially poetical genius, has always been identified. It was sufficient occupation for a bystander to listen to his magnificent plans, and to see their vanity; to note, half with anger, half with amusement, all his wiles and devices to elude actual work; and at the same time to admire and applaud what, when "much enforced," he would produce at a venture, flashing forth with no trouble at all verses such as nobody else could invent of all the tuneful throng, and talk such as man had never talked before.

Coleridge would seem to have been entirely without friends, or any succour or help, or even communication with his family at this time. They had freed him from his soldiering; and perhaps this freak had disgusted the good people, for there is not the smallest further appearance of kindred in his life. And he was in all ways so much poorer than his friend Southey, that not only had he no kind uncle to make openings for him, but no "Joan of Arc" to prove at least his power of work. He had not even, like so many penniless sons of fame, the talisman in his pocket, the manuscript with which fate might be defied. He had neither money nor money's worth. A few fugitive poems, a few courses of lectures, some of them only in intention, a million of plans, one as good as the other, equally and impartially regarded by their inventor, who was ready to take up or lay down any of them at a moment's notice, and with no one but Cottle to whom he could look for aid, his prospect was sufficiently blank. And thereupon he married to mend mat-

ters! The foundation upon which he established a household is about the slightest that ever supported any such superstructure. "Aware of his narrow circumstances," Cottle says, "and to make his mind as easy in pecuniary affairs as the extreme case would permit, I thought it would afford a small relief to tell him that I would give him a guinea and a half (after his volume was completed) for every hundred lines he might present to me, whether rhyme or blank verse. This offer appeared of more consequence in the estimation of Mr. Coleridge than it did in his who made it, for when a common friend asked him when married "How he was to keep the pot boiling?" he very promptly answered that "Mr. Cottle had made him such an offer that he felt no solicitude on the subject." He was but twenty-three, in all the chaos of youthful fancies, but confident and eloquent as always, full of novel ideas on every subject, and dazzling everybody with his genius, though he had done absolutely nothing to prove the possession of that indescribable inspiration which seems to have rayed out of him like light through a lantern. For one thing, the wants and requirements of the young couple were modest, if their temerity was great. Southey had considered the attainment of a hundred and fifty, or even a hundred, certain pounds a year between his friend and himself, enough to warrant the two marriages: and a guinea and a half for every hundred lines may have appeared an inexhaustible fortune to Coleridge. We feel almost disposed to utter a thanksgiving even now, that this liberal offer was not made to Southey before he set out upon his voyage, else how many hundreds, nay, hundreds of thousands, of meritorious, carefully-polished lines might we not have seen!

Coleridge took a cottage at Clevedon, on the muddy shore of the Bristol Channel, and here for a short time he seems to have been as happy as ever imprudent lover

was. The descriptions of the "pretty cot" and the "pensive Sara" who shared it are sweet and tranquil, as the sober certainty of bliss ought to be. Probably it was his first experience since his childhood of a home, and the unaccustomed charm held him happily captive. But the home was not very stationary; they went back to Bristol when the first enchantment was over, then to Nether Stowey, another village in Somersetshire. In the meantime, Coleridge started a little paper or weekly magazine, which was to be "undoubtedly the best thing of the kind ever published," as Southey had said. It was to contain the sublimest speculation and poetry, along with a weekly summary of news and debates; and Coleridge went about the country from town to town getting subscribers, varying his other occupations at the same time with that of a preacher. It was chiefly in Unitarian chapels that he preached, that vague and always intellectual sect having somehow attracted him during this misty period; and he appeared in the pulpit in coloured clothes, and occasionally discoursed upon such subjects as the Hair-powder Tax, to the consternation of his audience. Notwithstanding this curious choice of subject, his eloquence must have strongly affected the good provincial people whom he addressed, for it became some time after a question to be gravely debated in his life whether he should not settle down at Chursbury as a Socinian minister, a conclusion chiefly prevented by the Wedgewoods, Josiah and his brother, who offered him an annuity of a hundred and fifty pounds a year that he might relinquish the project, and be able to devote himself to literary work. A second edition of his volume of poetry had likewise been called for, which by Cottle's liberality added a little more to his funds. But the *Watchman* proved an entire failure, two numbers only appearing, and these not paying their expenses—fatal drawback, for which no amount of genius can make up.

Before this timely succour arrived, however, it is worth while quoting his own account both of the state of mind in which he was, and his intentions for the future:—

“ I verily believe no poor fellow’s idea-pot ever bubbled up so vehemently with fears, doubts, and difficulties, as mine does at present. Heaven grant it may not boil over and put out the fire. I am almost heartless.<sup>1</sup> My past life seems to me as a dream, a feverish dream, all one gloomy huddle of strange actions and dim-discovered motives, friendship lost by indolence, and happiness murdered by mismanaged sensibility. The present hour I seem in a quickset hedge of embarrassments. For shame! I ought not to mistrust God; but, indeed, to hope is far more difficult than to fear. . . . A sort of calm hopelessness diffuses itself over my heart. Indeed, every mode of life which has promised me bread and cheese has been one after another torn away from me, but God remains. . . . There are some poets who write too much at their ease from the facility with which they please themselves. They do not often enough

“ ‘ Feel their burled breast  
Heaving beneath incumbent Deity.’

So that to posterity their wreaths will look miserably, here perhaps, *an everlasting Amaranth*, and close by its side some weed of an hour, sere, yellow, and shapeless. They rely too much on story and event, to the neglect of these lofty imaginings that are peculiar to, and definite of the poet. The story of Milton might be told in two pages. It is this which distinguishes an epic poem from a romance in metre. Observe the march of Milton, his severe application, his laborious polish, his deep metaphysical researches, his prayer to God before he began his great work: all that could lift and swell his intellect became his daily food. I should not think of devoting less than twenty years to an epic poem. Ten years to collect materials and to warm my mind with universal science. I would be a tolerable mathematician. I would thoroughly understand mechanics, hydrostatics, optics, and astronomy, botany, metallurgy, chemistry, geology, anatomy, medicine; then the mind of man; then the minds of men; in all travels, voyages, and histories. So I should spend ten years; the next five in the composition of

<sup>1</sup> This word seems to be used by both Southey and Coleridge in the sense of without heart, discouraged, disheartened, as we should say.

the poem, and the five last in the correction of it. So would I write, haply not unhearing of that divine and nightly whispering voice which speaks to mighty minds of predestinated garlands, starry and unwithering."

It is fine to see the desponding poet forget himself and those little troubles about the bread and cheese, and rise to this great climax. No one yet, so far as we are aware, has ever prepared a great epic after this prescription; even Wordsworth, who has approached it most nearly, can scarcely be said to "have warmed his mind with universal science." But such a flash of purpose, lofty and ideal, comes, perhaps, more easily to those who make little attempt to carry their theories out, than to those who are seriously affected by them. We doubt, indeed, whether an epic which took twenty years' incubation would be worth the trouble; but not less fine was the vision of something great that some day might be attained, or, at least, any day might be dreamt of, dilating the dreamy eyes, and expanding the full lips.

About this time another and a greater figure suddenly comes upon the scene. A young pair from the north country, brother and sister, he a young man of serious mind and aspect, she a delicate spirit, a sort of poetical Ariel; both of them overflowing with poetry and enthusiasm, had come to the neighbourhood some time before. They were orphans, and had been long separated; and the pleasure of setting up a sort of home together, enhanced by the still greater pleasure of the discovery that each was to each the most congenial companion, filled their lives. Their means were as humble as those of the other young poets with whom they had not as yet been brought in contact, but more certain. Wordsworth had produced scarcely anything and earned nothing; but he had inherited from a friend a little fortune, £900, upon the interest of which he felt himself passing rich.

And Dorothy had a hundred pounds of her own. What was wanted more to be happy? Why they left their native dales which they loved so faithfully, for that tamer coast, we are not told; but here they were, established near the sea, spending their poetic leisure in the open air, in their garden, in endless walks and talks, while the young fortunes of the Coleridges and Southneys were being decided on the other side of the county. Wordsworth, like the others, had no great heart for the academical life or learning. He had taken his degree, which neither of the others did, but he had brought no distinctions with him from the University, a reflection which ought to teach these great bodies a certain humility. Wordsworth, however, had completed his education in a way which comparatively few men had attained to. In the long vacation of 1790, in the full fervour of the early revolution, he went to France, and saw with his own eyes the events which fired all Europe. Everybody now knows the lines in which he described the sentiment of the time.

“Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven, oh, times  
In which the meagre stale forbidding ways  
Of custom, law, and statute, took at once  
The attraction of a country in romance.”

Nothing could be farther from the nature of this serious youth than the noise and din of revolution; but to him, as to so many others, the outburst of new principles and new life in France was like a new gospel. It is hard now, knowing all that followed, to appreciate rightly the wonderful and entrancing novelty of that revelation. It sounded like the sublimest lesson of Christianity made into a national code, and about to actuate all the movements of political life in which so different a principle had reigned in spite of Christianity.



That all men were brothers had been feebly breathed in sermons for near two thousand years, but to hear it proclaimed from the throat of a whole people, a "unanimous hero nation," with no parable in it but a claim of irresistible and undoubted right, electrified every generous heart. Wordsworth landed in France on the eve of the day when Louis XVI. took the oath of fidelity to the Constitution. He was not old enough or wise enough to see what dark and fatal forces were lurking underneath the popular joy. He accepted the code of freedom and brotherhood as he would have accepted the proclamation of a new and noble king whose right to the throne all acknowledged with acclamations, and whose reign was to bring in the golden age. Few, perhaps, of the hot politicians who were kindled by the news, received it with such profound belief, with such intense satisfaction, as this grave young observer, to whom all noble principles were kindred. France, to him, took in a moment that curious representative position among the nations which it has been her strange fate to occupy ever since. Political changes were the least of the great things which the vast assembly of visionary souls throughout Europe, who then fixed their attention upon her words and ways, and this young Englishman in particular, expected from her. She was the champion of humanity. She was the spiritual Quixote, the last and greatest of the knight-errants. The Bastille was not only one actual stronghold of tyrannical power, but the palpable image of all oppression overthrown. The poor prisoners who crept out dazzled to the eye of day were emblems of human faculties enslaved, and human hearts broken by tyranny, but now gloriously emancipated and restored for the use and service of the world. What was going on in Paris was for the instruction, for the warning and guidance of mankind, the first step of a new and happier history; and

. that great town itself was but a stage on which the greatest of dramas was set forth in its first scene.

Wordsworth did not break out into revolutionary verse, nor did it occur to him to attempt to rouse his own country by any celebration of the old heroes of virtuous rebellion, as Southey did, whose mind was so much less moved than his. But after his first view of the riotous joy of France in her emancipation, he went back, at the earliest opportunity, drawn by an increasing fascination of interest in the great tragedy as it worked itself out, and inspired by an earnest and lofty curiosity which is most characteristic of him. He went and studied it, as afterwards he studied his mountains, wandering about, a deeply concerned, yet philosophical observer, through the flames and conflict. Even in the fervour of his youthful sympathy he was still a spectator, held back by an invisible bond of nature from all participation in the events which interested him so deeply. Not till long years after, when the play had been played out, and its hidden meanings revealed, did he put the narrative of his youthful investigation into words; and probably the grave tone of middle age modified that narrative unconsciously; but yet Wordsworth was always Wordsworth, and we recognise the sound of his young footstep, the familiar cadence of his voice amid the tumults which he mused upon. At the time it troubled him to feel that he was not sufficiently moved. When he picked up a stone of the Bastille to keep as a relic, he was conscious of a deficiency somewhere—

“I looked for something that I could not find,  
Affecting more emotion than I felt.”

and, bewildered by his own tranquillity, compared himself to a plant “glassed in a greenhouse”—

"That spreads its leaves in unmolested peace,  
While every bush and tree the country through,  
Is shaking to its roots."

Himself and his own individuality, and this calm atmosphere of spectatorship, accompanied him into the very midst of the flames, where he walked, and talked, and discussed all things with the young revolutionary General Beaupris "on the borders of the unhappy Loire," as if that river of blood had been a motionless tarn among his own mountains. When, however, the wandering observer found himself again in Paris, his composure gave way, and a troubled attempt to comprehend a hitherto unsuspected new meaning in the movement which he had hailed with so much sympathy, obscured his faculties. He stood on the scene of the September massacre a month after it happened, interrogating the very stones that had so lately run with blood, and gazing about him

"As doth a man  
Upon a volume, whose contents he knows  
Are memorable, but for him locked up ;  
Being written in a tongue he cannot read."

This brought him to a dead stop in his profound and anxious study. The mystery of this bloody interpolation into the tale of human enfranchisement and regeneration was beyond his power of solving. His imagination yielded to the terror that was in the air. When he reached the high and lonely chamber in the roof, where his lodging was, he watched all night, trying to read by intervals, unable to sleep, thinking he heard a voice which cried aloud to the whole city, "Sleep no more!" and finding that the place, "all hushed and silent as it was" had become

"Unfit for the repose of night,  
Defenceless as a wood where tigers roam."

It is a wonderful proof of the truthfulness with which Wordsworth, in the calm of after years, reported these sensations and convulsions of youth, that he does not represent himself as changed in his opinion of the main question at issue, even by contact with those terrible consequences of it. Though the carnage was a mystery and distress to him, and his spirit was overclouded and driven out of the easy certainty of youth by this revelation of cruelties and savage forces unthought of, yet he did not change in his conviction that France, in her passion and agony, was still accomplishing the highest of missions. "From all doubt," he says,

"Or trepidation of the end of things,  
Free was I as the angels are from guilt."

So profound was this faith, that when he returned home and found England excited by discussions about the slave trade (not to speak of the "Hair-powder Tax" on which Coleridge discoursed to his astonished audience), he dismissed the subject almost with contempt, in the strength of his conviction, that if France and the cause of freedom in her prospered, all other questions were involved in that great one, and universal setting right of all wrongs must follow as an inevitable consequence. And when in the process of time the young poet found his own country joined in the alliance against the great rebel of Europe, his dismay and despair had impassioned vent—

"No shock  
Given to my inmost nature had I known  
Down to that very moment,"

he cried out with sharp pain. No prayer for the success of England, no thanksgiving for her victories, could cross his lips. He saw the expeditions fitted out, the fleets ready to sail, with tears of indignant passion, "Oh, pity

and shame!" he exclaimed. To him this intervention of England in the affairs of the world, so potential as it turned out to be, so great a subject of national pride as it has been since, was an act which "tore away"

"By violence at our decision, rent  
From the best youth in England their dear pride,  
Their joy in England."

This was the opinion of all, at least, of the poets of the time and many of its most serious thinkers. Few, if any, voices now living would echo these indignant complaints. We may doubt whether the expedition to the Crimea was entirely heroic and wise, as we follow, with a painful and ashamed sense of our national deficiencies, Mr. Kinglake's great philosophical history, so different from all other martial records. But we have no doubt now of the greatness of English action and influence in the beginning of the century, or of the noble part our country then played in the world. To be sure, the protesters changed their opinion when Napoleon arose, the enemy of freedom as well as of Europe. But at the beginning, notwithstanding all the blood that had tarnished the progress of the revolution,—the murdered king and queen, the guillotine, and all its attendant horrors,—it is curious to be thus brought in sight of the strenuous opposition of "the best youth in England," recorded so long after, and with such seriousness, by one of the least revolutionary of men.

This was the young man whom Coleridge, in all the visionary chaos of his thousand plans, had suddenly stumbled upon. Wordsworth had been thrown all astray in his life by that strange revolution episode—an episode which, notwithstanding much change of opinion, had the greatest lifelong effect upon his works. He had come to that moment of doubt as to what was

to become of him, which occurs to so many young men after their early training is over. But already, like all young men of genius, he had found, among his contemporaries, admirers and believers—and one of these, Raisley Calvert, the friend with whom he had travelled, left him at his death a sum of money, expressly with the understanding that it was to enable him to exercise “powers and attainments which might be of use to mankind.” On receiving this bequest, Wordsworth, as has been said, took his only sister Dorothy from their uncle’s house, and the two went forth together in that delightful union of brother and sister, which is, when it implies such perfect sympathy and agreement as existed between these two, one of the most exquisite of relationships. They took a house called Racedown Lodge, near Crewkerne, on the borders of Dorset and Somerset—“the place dearest to my recollection in the whole world,” Miss Wordsworth writes. “It was the first home I had.” Without taking his sister into consideration, no just idea can be formed of Wordsworth. He was, as it were, henceforward the spokesman to the world of two souls. It was not that she visibly and consciously aided or stimulated him, but that she was a part of him, a second pair of eyes to see, a second and more delicate intuition to discern. This union was so close, that in many instances it becomes difficult to distinguish which is the brother and which the sister. She was part not only of his life but of his imagination. He saw by her, felt through her; at her touch the strings of the instrument began to thrill, the great melodies awoke. Her journals are Wordsworth in prose, just as his poems are Dorothy in verse. The one soul kindled at the other. These two young poets took up their life together in an idyllic purity of happiness which it is delightful to think of. No warmer wishes were theirs—the world was

far from them and all its concerns. The mornings and evenings, the sunsettings and dews, the sky and atmosphere, were their study, the occupation of their life. Why those children of the mountains should have chosen a scene so unlike that which was native to them, we are not told—but here they had lived for two long years, happy upon their tiny income, in each other's society, when Coleridge was wafted their way by a chance breeze from heaven, or kind suggestion of some wayfaring angel. It is to be supposed that more earthly means of introduction were employed, and it is even suggested that the two poets had made each other's acquaintance some time before; but they came together and formed a real and instantaneous alliance at the house of Racedown early in 1797. "At first I thought him very plain, that is for about three minutes," Dorothy Wordsworth says "He is pale, thin, has a wide mouth, thick lips, and not very good teeth, longish, loose-growing, half curling, rough black hair. But if you hear him speak for five minutes you think no more of them." It is clear from every testimony that Coleridge thus carried his charter of genius openly displayed wherever he went. No one could be in any doubt about him. "His forehead was broad and high, light, as if built of ivory, with large projecting eyebrows, and his eyes rolling beneath them like a sea with darkened lustre," says Hazlitt. He "dissipated all doubts on the subject by beginning to talk. He did not cease while he stayed, nor has he since that I know of." At no time of his life did Coleridge require to carry any proofs of his genius about with him, but it is all the more wonderful that it should have been so universally acknowledged at this period, since his little volume published by Cottle had given little indication of it. Nor was there much in the volume of "Descriptive Sketches," tame and smooth

which Wordsworth had already put forth. But they recognised each other on the spot.

And from the moment of the meeting the very atmosphere seems to grow luminous about these two great figures,—the group which Dorothy, all soul and emotion, the most wonderful of sympathetic hearers, made complete. The youthful sublimity and delight of the encounter are mingled with a youthful exaggeration and absurdity which must conciliate the hardest critic. The first evening they spent together is described by Dorothy. “The first thing,” she says, “that was read after he came was William’s new poem, the ‘Ruined Cottage’ (afterwards embodied in the first book of the *Excursion*—the story of Margaret), with which he was much delighted; and after tea he repeated to us two acts and a half of his tragedy ‘Osorio.’ The next evening William read his tragedy, ‘The Borderers.’” This sudden plunge ten fathom deep into the silver sea of poetry is portentous, yet delightful. Wordsworth was no critic, and never seems to have known the sublime from the matter-of-fact in his own work, but it is a curious evidence of the incompetence of even the most delicate of critical faculties, when disturbed by influences either of *amour propre* or friendly enthusiasm, that Coleridge should not have discerned any special difference between the wonderful reality and original power of the first of these poems and the commonplace verse of the tragedy. But though much of what they thus communicated to each other has dropped from the records of fame, it does not less interest us to know that each discovered in the other, with genuine enthusiasm, those secret signs of brotherhood which are more potent than the ties of nature. Nothing could be more interesting than such a meeting. Wordsworth was twenty-seven, his new friend two years younger, and great as their



after achievements were, no doubt there shone before them in the golden mists of these early days many an impossible triumph such as earthly powers have never yet realised. They walked about together over the downs, with their heads in the clouds, disclosing all their hopes and dreams to each other, visionary philosophers full of the highest thoughts, as well as poets with the vision and the faculty divine in their youthful eyes. Half spectator, half inspirer, the deep-eyed rapid girl between heard, and saw, and felt, and enhanced every passing thought and emotion; and with an enthusiasm which borders on extravagance, they divined, and understood, and celebrated each other. "He is a wonderful man," Dorothy wrote; "his conversation teems with soul, and mind, and spirit." Coleridge, on his part, describes "Wordsworth and his exquisite sister" with equal fervour. "I speak with heartfelt sincerity, and I think unblinded judgment, when I tell you that I feel a small man by his side," he writes; and of Dorothy he adds, "In every motion her innocent soul outbeams so brightly, that who saw her would think guilt was a thing impossible to her. Her information is various, her eye watchful in observation of nature, and her taste a perfect electrometer." It is curious that Coleridge should have embodied part of these words in his description of Joan of Arc—whether he was quoting from the already published text, or if he afterwards added them in his numerous revisions, it is difficult to say.

This rapid conquest of each other made by the three friends advanced so quickly, that, in a month after the beginning of their acquaintance, the Wordsworths removed from Racedown to a house called Alfoxden, near Nether Stowey, in which village Coleridge was living—"our principal inducement being Coleridge's society." Here they lived in the closest intercourse, making plans and verses enough to fill the whole air with echoes.

“Upon smooth Quantock’s airy ridge we roam’d,  
Unchecked, or loitered ’mid his sylvan combs ;  
Thou in bewitching words with happy heart  
Didst chant the vision of that ancient man,  
The bright-eyed mariner, and rueful woes  
Didst utter of the Lady Christabel—  
And I, associate with such labours, steeped  
In soft forgetfulness the livelong hours,  
Murmuring of him who, joyous hap, was found  
After the perils of his moonlight ride  
Near the loud waterfall : or her who sate  
In misery near the miserable Thorn.”

Hazlitt’s account of the pair of poets and the intercourse in which they lived,—a kind of Apostolic life having all things poetical in common,—affords so complete a picture of their intercourse, and of the real beginnings of their memorable works, that it is indispensable here.

“In the afternoon Coleridge took me over to Alfoxden, a romantic old family mansion of the St. Aubins, where Wordsworth lived. It was then in the possession of a friend of the poet’s, who gave him the free use of it. Wordsworth himself was from home, but his sister kept house, and set before us a frugal repast, and we had free access to her brother’s poems, the ‘Lyrical Ballads,’ which were still in manuscript. I dipped into a few of these with great satisfaction and with the faith of a novice.” . . . Next “morning, as soon as breakfast was over, we strolled out into the park, and seating ourselves on the trunk of an old ash tree, Coleridge read aloud, with a sonorous and musical voice, the ballad of ‘Betty Foy.’ I was not critically or sceptically inclined. I saw touches of truth and nature, and took the rest for granted. But in the ‘Thorn,’ the ‘Mad Mother,’ and the ‘Complaint of a poor Indian Woman,’ I felt that deeper power and pathos which have since been acknowledged as the characteristics of this author, and the sense of a new style and a new spirit in poetry came over me. It had to me something of the effect that arises from the turning up of fresh soil, or of the first welcome breath of spring. Coleridge and myself walked back to Stowey that evening, and his voice sounded high

“‘Of providence, fore-knowledge, will, and fate,  
Fix’d fate, free will, fore-knowledge absolute.’

"He lamented that Wordsworth was not prone enough to belief in the traditional superstitions of the place, and that there was a something corporeal, a matter-of-factness, a clinging to the palpable or often to the petty in his poetry, in consequence. . . . He said, however, if I remember right, that this objection must be confined to his descriptive pieces, that his philosophic poetry had a grand and comprehensive spirit in it, so that his soul seemed to inhabit the universe like a palace, and to discover truth by intuition rather than by deduction. . . . We went over to Alfoxden again the day following, and Wordsworth read us the story of 'Peter Bell' in the open air. There is a *chant* in the recitation both of Coleridge and Wordsworth, which acts as a spell upon the hearer and disarms the judgment. Perhaps they have deceived themselves by making habitual use of this ambiguous accompaniment. Coleridge's manner is more full, animated, and varied; Wordsworth's more equable, sustained, and internal. Coleridge has told me that he himself liked to compose in walking over uneven ground, or breaking through the straggling branches of a copse-wood, whereas Wordsworth always composed walking up and down a straight gravel walk, or in some spot where the continuity of his verse met with no collateral interruptions."

Thus the two poets came to the edge of their first joint publication, a book which, amid all its manifold imperfections, its presumptions, and assumptions, was yet to give the world assurance of two new lights of the greatest magnitude in its firmament. They had, as we have said, all things in common; the "Lyrical Ballads" were the family store to which the young visitor had "free access" as to the bread and butter which Dorothy served him. To take a poem out of the stock, and read it aloud as they sat on the fallen ash tree in these long sweet summer afternoons, was the natural entertainment. What did it matter which of the two communicated that pleasure? It was "Betty Foy," not the "Ancient Mariner," that Coleridge read; but the "Ancient Mariner" too was getting itself chanted forth to the accompaniment of all the winds and storms that swept the seas, and to the sweeter cadence of the rippling calm. As they walked about "for miles and miles on the brown

heaths overlooking the Channel," the happy youth, thus admitted into the poet's confidence, "pointed out to Coleridge's notice the bare masts of a vessel on the very edge of the horizon, and within the red-orbed disk of the setting sun, like his own spectre ship in the 'Ancient Mariner.'" Who can doubt that the poet had seen it already, and many a wonder more?

In the meantime Southey had come home, and had begun the course of industry and continuous work from which he never deviated all his after-life. He got employment on the Reviews and newspapers, he wrote and published "Letters from Portugal," he planned innumerable works. Complaining of his dislike to "desultory topics," he reveals his own love of the gigantic with curious simplicity and the same absence of all critical perception in respect to his own works which we have noted in his greater brethren. "Joan of Arc," he says, "was a whole—it was something to think of at every moment of solitude, and to dream of at night: my heart was in the poem; I threw my own feelings into it in my own language, ay, and out of one part of it and another you may find my own character. Seriously, to go on with Madoc is *almost* necessary to my happiness; I had rather leave off eating than poetising." But now these big works had no longer the assistance of Coleridge's enthusiasm and co-operation. There was not apparently any severance of friendship; they had quarrelled, but had been reconciled; and the transference of Charles Lloyd, a young man of wealth and weakness, a poet in his way, who had for some time lived at Nether Stowey with Coleridge, helping to keep the house by the allowance made for his board—to Southey's household instead, was not an element of harmony; but there seems to have been no positive breach. However, Southey expunged the portion written by Coleridge from his "Joan of Arc,"

and Coleridge threw himself entirely into the society of Wordsworth, publishing conjointly with him. He had a tendency always to unite his friends with himself in his books. Poems, both by Charles Lloyd, his temporary companion, and by his old and faithful friend Charles Lamb, whose delicate and delightful personality ought to have come into this sketch ere now, were mingled, to the confusion of editors, in his second volume of poetry. His conjunction with Wordsworth went so far as interlineation. It seems to have been a necessity of his nature to weave himself in with some more steady, more deeply-rooted being.

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE LYRICAL BALLADS.

THIS conjoint volume was published in September 1798. It was the product of those wonderful roamings over "smooth Quantock's airy ridge," and all the long intercourse of the endless summer days, when Coleridge wove the most wonderful dream-tissues of his genius, and Wordsworth produced so much that was immortal—and something, too, that was not worthy of immortality. The book was received by the world not as the revelation of two new poets, but as something like an insult to its own fine taste and lofty standards of excellence. A shout of derision rose from all the critics; and England in general can scarcely be said to have been less than personally offended by this serious and almost solemn attempt to impose a new poetical creed upon her. Few abortive publications have ever raised so great a ferment—for it could not at first be called anything but abortive. The book was so badly received, and sold so poorly, that when Cottle—always generous, who had given Wordsworth thirty guineas for it, his usual measure of what poetic genius was worth—sold his copyrights to Longman in London shortly after, he found that this was considered as of no value at all, and restored it to its original owners. Yet this was the volume which contained the "Ancient Mariner," a poem in which there was no insult-

ing assault upon poetic diction, or selection of the prosaic and colloquial in language, but which seems to have been passed over in the ferment raised about Alice Fell's torn cloak, and the other familiarities of the volume. We cannot venture to say now that the critics had not some excuse. The book was a challenge and a defiance. The young writer was bent not only upon instructing mankind, which was a legitimate aim, by the real message which he had to deliver, but on revolutionising the very form and fashion under which poetry had hitherto addressed the world. It was a fantastic as well as a presumptuous attempt; and though one poet was the chief offender, the system had been settled upon after numberless discussions between the two, who combined with the fervour of their personal convictions a contempt for the opinion of the public, which was heightened by confidence in its inevitable docility and submission, one time or another, to themselves, its natural leaders. They knew, and were rather pleased to think, that the critics would be puzzled and startled; but they did not perceive how likely such an attempt was to run into extravagance, or how good taste and good sense might both be sacrificed to the polemics of the effort. Coleridge has given us, in his *Biographia Literaria*, an elaborate description of their scheme. It was to be "a series of poems, of two sorts."

"In the one the incidents and agents were to be in part at least supernatural, and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real in this sense they have been to every human being who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency. For the second class subjects were to be chosen from actual life; the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them when they present themselves. In this idea originated the plan of the Lyrical Ballads, in which it was agreed that my endea-

vours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object to give the charm of novelty to the things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural by awakening the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and wonders of the world before us—an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes and see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.”

These ostentatiously simple means of awakening the public suffered the fate of all that is artificial and factitious. To begin a serious and affecting poem thus—

“A little child, dear brother Jim,”

which was, as originally written, the first line (afterwards left incomplete) of “We are Seven;” to concentrate the interest of a first volume of poetry in a long-winded production like the “Idiot Boy;” to introduce into serious verse

“A household tub, like one of those  
Which women use to wash their clothes,”

were sins for which there is very little excuse, and which mere rebellion against the hackneyed medium of poetic diction, of which Cowper and Burns had already broken the spell, does not justify. And when we see that this was not done accidentally but with serious intention, and from a height of superiority, as if something sacred and sublime was in the narrative of Johnny's ride and Harry Gill's shivering, the indignation of the public strikes us as not without reason. This foolish and quite unnecessary attempt was insisted upon as the very essence and soul of his mission by Wordsworth himself, until maturing years improved his perceptions and his taste. Nothing



could be more distinctly characteristic of the curious self-absorption of his nature. He was a law to himself; the example of all older poetry and the opinion of the world were nothing to him until time had gradually revealed the fact, which is so often imperceptible to youth, that all things are not equally important; that in poetry, as in life, there are different magnitudes, and that the fullest truth to nature does not demand a slavish adherence to fact. What he intended to demonstrate was, that the feelings of Betty Foy, while her boy was lost, were as deep and tragical, and as worthy of revelation to the world, as would have been those of a queen; and there is no doubt that this is perfectly true: the idea that any one would have ventured to assert the contrary existed only in Wordsworth's fancy. But the choice of such colloquial familiarity of treatment as suggests a jocular rather than a serious meaning, the absolute insignificance of the incident, and the absence of any attempt to give grace and dignity to the story, balked its effect completely as an exposition of nature, while the humour in it was too feeble, too diffuse, to give it a lively comic interest. Cowper had ventured to be quite as colloquial and realistic in *John Gilpin*, with electrical effect: but then the spirit and pure fun of that performance were inimitable, whereas Wordsworth's fun never rose above a tame reflective banter. Thus in his longest poem he failed, and failed utterly, in the very purpose which he had taken up with such fanatic enthusiasm, and determination to convince and proselytise. He did not "give the charm of novelty to the things of every day," nor "excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural by awaking the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us." This was what he had undertaken to do; and we do not wonder that the world, always more eager to seize upon a visible

failure than to hail a modest success, should have received his high profession with incredulity and even with scoffing. What he did succeed in doing was to give such evidences of his real genius, that, some choice spirits at once, and by slow degrees the general public, learnt to appreciate it, in spite of the fictitious swaddling bands in which it had been his caprice to bind it; but this was a very different issue from that which Wordsworth intended and desired.

We may therefore freely acknowledge that the world was not likely to derive any altogether new revelation of human nature, or even to acquire a deeper insight into those manifestations which it saw daily, by means of Betty Foy and Susan Gale. This was a mistake, and a presumptuous mistake, one of the follies of the wise, which are more foolish than the unconscious imbecilities of nature. But alongside of this failure, and even within it, there appeared certain brief and delicate studies of humanity which no true soul could disdain. The child who "lightly draws her breath, and feels her life in every limb," dwelling in angelic simplicity on the borders of the unseen, and knowing no reason for that blank barrier between, which our less keen faculties come to so dead a pause before—and the fanciful and innocent philosopher, grave in his little fiction, as if it were the solemnest truth, who justifies his preference of one place over another by the first external circumstance that catches his eye, "at Kilve there was no weather-cock:" were revelations of a very different kind from that of the "Idiot Boy," made without any ostentation of homeliness, with all the grace and sweetness of spontaneous verse; yet certainly calculated to awake "the mind's attention," and disclose the deeper things of nature lying under our very eyes, but so little noted. No one till then, not Shakespeare himself, had so revealed that simplest yet most complex germ of humanity, separated from us by a dis-

tion more subtle than any which exists between rich and poor, yet entirely intelligible to us—the mind of a child. The poet, however, would scarcely seem to have been aware that in this way, and not in the other, he was carrying out his promise, by no forced lowliness of subject or diction, but by the penetration of a new and tender insight. In something of the same way he here begins to open up those associations of the mind with natural objects which were henceforward to take so great a place in his philosophy. Burns's "Mouse" and his "Daisy" had given a width of pathetic meaning to the humblest objects, but this was rather by a humanising of the little "timorous cowering beastie," and the crushed flower, than by that luminous contemplation which, without changing in the least degree the outward object, takes it into the human bosom, and makes it a source of gladness or instruction. We cannot better instance this great and novel power than by one of the most lovely of Wordsworth's smaller poems:—

"I wander'd lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

"Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the milky way,  
They stretch'd in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay:  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

"The waves beside them danced, but they  
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee:—  
A poet could not but be gay,  
In such a jocund company:  
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought  
What wealth this show to me had brought:

“For oft when on my couch I lie,  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude,  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.”<sup>1</sup>

Nothing can be more different from this than a flower which is made the type and emblem of human circumstances: “such is the fate of artless maid.” No moral reflection, no lesson is in it. It is but a perception, a seeing of something simple and common, yet too delicate and refined to be so much as thought of by the crowd—of the manner in which scenes and accidents of nature enter into us, are hung like pictures upon the walls of our secret chambers, and live to refresh us and recreate us, the most inalienable of all possessions for ever. Here was indeed a stirring of “the lethargy of custom,” a thought that might be allowed “to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural;” for every musing mind must have felt that its inner pleasures were thus divined, and another happiness added to the list of those for which a man might hope.

But these lovely snatches of profound and simple thought were perhaps too brief and unobtrusive to catch at the first glimpse the public eye, and all were lumped up together in the indiscriminate opprobrium called forth by the inane simplicities of “Goody Blake” and “Betty Foy.” What is still more memorable, however, is the fact that the poet himself seems to have been unaware of the difference between them. In the confusion of his youth, amid all the tumult of rising and developing

<sup>1</sup> The poem which we had quoted at random was, as the writer finds on examination, written at a later period. Others, however, to which our remarks will equally apply, will be found in the volume of *Lyrical Ballads*; but as this is perhaps the most perfect and the most simple example of one of Wordsworth's noticeable qualities, we prefer to let it stand as the illustration of these remarks.

powers, he knew no more than his audience did which was the true and which the fictitious metal; nay, it would almost seem that the inferior work appeared to him more important and better than the best. He tells us with simple elation, speaking of the "Idiot Boy"—"This long poem was composed in the groves of Alfoxden almost extempore, not a word, I believe, being corrected, though one stanza was omitted. I mention this in gratitude to those happy moments, for in truth I never wrote anything with so much glee." This curious boyish simplicity, delighted with the thought that its production was "almost extempore," and that not a word was corrected, blunts the edge of the critic's comment, and melts him into indulgence. It is doubly strange and doubly startling to find so singular a delusion in the mind of one who was so deep a student of his own nature, and had already so high a theory of his mission and work. But there are other traces besides this of Wordsworth's youthfulness. The "dear brother Jim" of "We are Seven" was added in the spirit of sheer nonsense, at Coleridge's urgent prayer. "We all enjoyed the joke of putting in our friend James Tobin's name," says Wordsworth, with a boyish delight in mischief, though he objected to the rhyme as ridiculous. That two of the greatest figures in modern literature should thus disport themselves is the most wonderful evidence of that love of fun which exists in every wholesome youthful breast: but to play such tricks with the public was not respectful to that great power, which is the final judge of all excellence, and which exceedingly resented the liberty. There were people, indeed, who thought the whole volume a hoax, and who, between the bewildering mysteries of the "Ancient Mariner" and the wordy foolishness of "Betty Foy," believed nothing less than that they were being laughed at—a result which was the fault of the poets, and not of their astonished audience.

This curious mixture of success and failure appears in about exactly the same proportions in the longer poem produced at the same time, and intended for publication in this volume, the story of "Peter Bell." Here once more the poet breaks down in what he means to be the most important part of his work, and is brilliantly successful at a point which he has considered but little. We know no description of the kind which can bear comparison with the first part of "Peter Bell." The sketch of the potter is one of those extraordinary pictures which, once produced, nothing can obliterate. It is simple fact, true to the individual man in outward appearance, temper, manners, and character, as if it had been a photograph; and at the same time it is absolute truth, embracing a whole race of men, transcending the little limits of the generations, true to-day, and to the end of the world. Nor is it the portrait of the potter alone which is set before us. With a subtle skill, the poet brings in himself, with all his fine perceptions, the vision and faculty divine that is in his own eyes and soul, as painters sometimes put in a tender and visionary background to throw up and bring into full relief the figure that occupies the front of the picture. A certain unexpressed surprise at the thing he has called into being, and comparison of this strange ruffian with himself, is, we can see, visible all through in Wordsworth's thoughts, a comparison which makes him both smile and sigh; that such a being should breathe while the other kind, the species of himself, was still existing, how wonderful! Then, with a half-humorous, half-melancholy minuteness, he shows us in glimpses that world so lovely to himself which surrounds the unawakened soul—the hamlets which lie deep and low, each "beneath its little patch of sky and little lot of stars," the tender grass "leading its earliest green along the lane," the primrose,

which is nothing but a yellow primrose to Peter, the soft blue sky melting through the high branches on the forest's edge. All this rises before us, while Peter, unconcerned and rude, leading his lawless life in the midst, roving among the vales and streams, sleeping beside his asses on the hills, couched on the warm heath, below the sunshine or under the trees, and neither noticing nor caring, trudges through the landscape with the surly half-contempt of his kind.

“ Though Nature could not touch his heart  
By lovely forms, and silent weather,  
And tender sounds, yet you might see  
At once, that Peter Bell and she  
Had often been together.

“ A savage wildness round him hung  
As of a dweller out of doors :  
In his whole figure and his mien  
A savage character was seen  
Of mountains and of dreary moors.

“ To all the unshaped half-human thoughts  
That solitary Nature feeds  
’Mid summer storms or winter’s ice,  
Had Peter joined whatever vice  
The cruel city breeds.

“ His face was keen as is the wind  
That cuts along the hawthorn fence ;  
Of courage you saw little there,  
But, in its stead, a medley air  
Of cunning and of impudence.

“ He had a dark and sidelong walk,  
And long and slouching was his gait ;  
Beneath his looks so bare and bold,  
You might perceive his spirit cold  
Was playing with some inward bait.

“ His forehead wrinkled was and furred ;  
A work one half of which was done  
By thinking of his ‘ whens ’ and ‘ hows ; ’

And half, by knitting of his brows,  
Beneath the glaring sun.

“There was a hardness in his cheek,  
There was a hardness in his eye,  
As if the man had fixed his face,  
In many a solitary place,  
Against the wind and open sky.”

Thus, this portrait is made to expound not only the feelingless and rude character of the subject, but at the same time the poetic nature which has conceived it. It is the most forcible representation of what is by what is not, and suggestion of a whole world of beauty and meaning by the distinct embodiment of a sphere in which these qualities are altogether absent, which ever was executed. The force of the picture lies not in sympathy, but antipathy, the writer and his theme standing, as it were, at the opposite poles of existence. But when the reader turns from this wonderful beginning to the “tale,” so called, that follows, he is brought down into dulness and failure with all the luckless force of gravitation, falling like Lucifer from heaven into unspeakable depths. How Peter found an ass upon the banks of the “murmuring river Swale ;” how the ass,

“With motion dull,  
Upon the pivot of its skull  
Turned round his long left ear ;”

how he then gave forth, and prolonged to all the echoes,

“Most ruefully a deep-drawn shout,  
The hard dry see-saw of his terrible bray ;”

how Peter, stopped in his first delighted intention of stealing the beast, discovered the corpse of the pedlar who owned him in the water, and, struck to the heart by the poor animal's faithfulness, was guided by it to the poor man's cottage, carrying the news of his death to his



wife and children ; and how the stillness and solemnity of the night, and the strange adventure, so wrought upon him that he

“Forsook his crimes, renounced his folly,  
And, after ten months’ melancholy,  
Became a good and honest man ;”

is told in page after page of confused and tedious verse, to which even the measure and cadence, so finely adapted to the clear-cut lines of the previous description, is prejudicial, chopping up the story into small morsels, and dissipating the interest—such as it is. No deterioration could be more marked. The beginning is instinct with life and meaning, while all that follows is meandering, diffuse, and obscure—the one a model of continuous thought and happy expression, the other strained into ludicrous simplicity and faithfulness to fact, provoking laughter when it means to be solemn, yet never bold and strong enough to rise into true humour. We reach the climax of strange confusion when we read the poet’s own account of the newspaper anecdote which suggested the poem, and of his close study at Alfoxden of the “habits, traits, and physiognomy of asses.” “I have no doubt,” he adds, “that I was put upon writing the poem of Peter Bell out of liking for the creature that is so often dreadfully abused.” Thus his intention was, to make his tale about an uncouth ruffian and a drowned pedlar a triumphant proof of the power of poetry to instruct the world by the meanest subjects ; and to turn something still less dignified and romantic than an idiot, an ass, into the hero of the epic. In this project he completely failed ; but here genius stepping in set the balance right, and by the way, without any set purpose or heroic meaning, betrayed him into that picture of the wild tramp and wanderer which can never die. We fear, however, so

irredeemable is the tale, that it is only the sworn disciples of Wordsworth who have ever been fully aware of this jewel in the toad's head, this matchless preface to a performance, for which, as a whole, no one but a fanatic could find anything to say.

The contribution of the other member of the poetical partnership to the "Lyrical Ballads" was in itself much more memorable than anything produced by Wordsworth—though the attention of the public never seems to have been attracted by it, and criticism passed it over in delighted perception of the opportunities of slaughter afforded by the other. The allotment of the supernatural and mysterious to himself is accounted for by Coleridge in curious apparent unconsciousness of any bias in himself towards that sphere of poetical contemplation, by purely arbitrary reasons. In the long walks and talks which the Wordsworths and he took together, one of the chief interests of the beautiful landscape which they surveyed from "Quantock's airy ridge," was the constant change of light and colour flitting over it, the rhythmic flight of the shadows and vicissitudes of the atmosphere. "The sudden charm which accidents of light and shade, which moonlight or sunshine, diffused over a familiar landscape, appeared to represent the practicability of combining" those two distinct forces in poetry which they were so fond of discussing—"the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature—and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination." Wordsworth's part was that of the sunshine, dwelling upon and bringing out into brilliant prominence the minutest detail of some certain spot in the valley or slopes below. And Coleridge, with a readiness which was half loyal submission and half that consciousness of unbounded faculty which made him so fertile in plans of every kind, took up the other

because it was left to him by the distinct natural bias of his companion. Such at least is the natural inference to be drawn from his own account of the matter. And up to this time Coleridge had shown no special inclination towards the supernatural; his poems had been, like his friend's, descriptive, with an admixture of high moral sentiment and reflection, but nothing more—when they were not fiercely political, and concerned with the passions of the day. Even when he helped to celebrate the inspired Maiden, the heroine of France, no native instinct seems to have led him to the means of her inspiration, the heavenly voices and visions to which he could have lent a mystic form and reality. He took up this sphere of poetry now, because, it would seem, the other was manifestly preoccupied, and one thing was as easy as another to his many-sided soul. Never perhaps was the preordained instrument put into a great singer's hands in a manner more accidental. For his own part he did not much care which it was; he was as ready to have plunged into science, into metaphysics, or politics. But in the meantime, as the supernatural was wanted to throw up and complete the real, the supernatural was the subject he adopted. His attitude is like that of a man groping in the darkness for his tools, and finding them by heavenly guidance, without any prevision or pre-inclination of his own.

It was in pursuance of this plan that the "Ancient Mariner" was composed—in those very woods of Alfoxden perhaps, where Wordsworth, with a beatitude which half angers, half amuses the reader, was crooning over the endless verses of "Betty Foy:" or on the road between that poetical place and the cottage at Nether Stowey, a road which led over the brown downs, from which the poet, as we know, could see, by times a spectral ship gliding athwart the setting sun, or the pilot's boat pushed

out upon the crisp morning waves for the guidance of the homeward bound. We can almost perceive the mariner's mystic progress shaping itself, as in all moods and tempers the poet looks forth upon the sea, and beholds in imagination not only the lighthouse tower, the kirk and the bay, but all the wide-spreading wastes of water beyond the firmament, and the wonders that may be passing there. Perhaps some white gull winging across the darkness of a storm cloud suggested to him the bird "that made the wind to blow"—the friendly wild companion of the seamen's course that

"Every day for food and play  
Came to the mariner's hollo ;"

perhaps to himself, straying along with his head in the clouds, the sight of it was like that of "a Christian soul," whom he hailed in God's name; perhaps the crack of some heartless rifle, the sudden drop through the gloomy air of the innocent winged brother thus met on the way, sent his indignant imagination forth to conceive what punishment he should deserve who thus sent out of happy life a fellow-creature who meant him nothing but friendship. And thus day by day, as he went and came, the seas would render up their secrets, and Nature's revenge for her child extend into all the weird and mysterious consequences of man's breach of faith with the subject-creation. Neither the poet himself nor his companions seem to have perceived the extraordinary superiority of this wonderful conception to the other poems with which it was published; for not only was its subject much more elevated, but it possessed in fact all the completeness of execution and faithfulness to its plan, which they failed in. While Wordsworth represented the light in the landscape chiefly in his imitation of the prominence sometimes given by the sunshine to the most

insignificant spot, Coleridge carried out the similitude on his side with a faithfulness of the grandest kind. Like a great shadow moving noiselessly over the widest sweep of mountain and plain, a pillar of cloud—or like the flight of indescribable fleecy hosts of winged vapours spreading their impalpable influence like a breath, changing the face of the earth, subduing the thoughts of men, yet nothing, and capable of no interpretation—such was the great poem destined to represent in the world of poetry the effect which these mystic cloud-agencies have upon the daylight and the sky. The life of every day is going on gaily, the wedding guests are close to the festal doors, when Mystery and Wonder suddenly interpose in the way, shutting out everything else around. The sounds of the other existence are heard through them, and even by glimpses that life is visible—the merry minstrels “nodding their heads,” the bride in her blushes—but the unwilling listener has entered into the shadow, and the unseen has got hold of him. It is a parable, not only of the ship and the albatross (which is hard of interpretation), but of mankind, a stranger upon earth, “moving about in worlds not realised,” always subject to be seized upon by powers unknown to which he is of kin, though he understands them not. “There is more of the invisible than the visible in the world, *plures esse Naturas invisibiles quam visibiles in rerum universitate*,” is the poet’s motto, and with a great splendour and force of imagination he enforces his text. “There was a ship,” quoth he—and the weird vessel glides before the unwilling listener’s eyes, so that he can see nothing else. It comes between him and the feast, between him and those figures of his friends which flit like ghosts out of every door. Which is the real, and which the vision? The mind grows giddy, and ceases to be able to judge; and while everything tangible disappears, the unseen sweeps

triumphantly in and holds possession, more real, more true, more unquestionable, than anything that eye can see.

This was what Coleridge meant when, seated on the breezy hillside with shadow and sunshine pursuing each other over the broad country at his feet, he took in hand to add to the common volume a poem which should deal with the supernatural and invisible, "so as to transfer from our outward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of the imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith." We might even find a further symbolism in the scene, within which this tale of mystery and fate came into being, and the circumstances which have framed, in a lovely picture of greenness and summer beauty, indulgent skies and youthful happiness, one of the gravest, profoundest, and most lofty utterances of poetry—a song which was "chanted with happy heart," with pleasant breaks of laughter and eager discussion, with glad gazings upon sun and shadow, with many a playful interruption and criticism—out of the heart of as sad a life as ever enacted itself in tragic pain and darkness before the eyes of men.

Nor was the story of the Mariner itself unworthy of its aim, or of the wonderful wealth of poetic resource poured forth upon it. When the struggle between the actual and the invisible is over, and the Mariner is triumphant, what a stillness as of the great deep falls upon the strain! The sun comes up out of the sea, and goes down into it—grand image of the loneliness, the isolation from all other created things, of that speck upon the boundless noiseless waters. Throughout the poem this sentiment of isolation is preserved with a magical and most impressive reality: all the action is absolutely shut up within the doomed ship. The storm, and the

mist, and the snow, the flitting vision of the albatross, the spectre vessel against the sunset, the voices of the spirits, all derive their importance from that one centre of human life, driven before the tyrannous wind or held at the pleasure of the still more terrible calm, yet the only thing that gives meaning to either. The one man who is the chronicler of all, and to whose fate everything refers, is never withdrawn from our attention for a moment. He is, as it were, the epitome of humankind, the emblem of the sinner and sufferer, shut up within those rotting bulwarks, beneath those sails so thin and sere. The awful trance of silence in which his being is involved,—a silence of awe and pain, yet of a dumb enduring unconquerable force,—descends upon us and takes possession of our spirits also: no loud bassoon, no festal procession, can break the charm of that intense yet passive consciousness. We grow silent with him “with throat unslaked, with black lips baked,” in a sympathy which is the very climax of poetic pain. And then what touches of tenderness are those that surprise us in this numbness and trance of awful solitude—

“O happy living things! no tongue  
Their beauty might declare:  
A spring of love rushed from my heart,  
And I blessed them unaware:  
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,  
And I blessed them unaware”——

or this other which comes after the horror of the reanimated bodies, the ghastly crew of the dead-alive:—

“For when it dawned, they dropped their arms,  
And clustered round the mast;  
Sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths,  
And from their bodies passed.  
Around, around, flew each sweet sound,  
Then darted to the Sun;  
Slowly the sounds came back again,

Now mixed, now one by one.  
 Sometimes a-dropping from the sky  
 I heard the sky-lark sing ;  
 Sometimes all little birds that are,  
 How they seemed to fill the sea and air  
 With their sweet jargoning !  
 And now 'twas like all instruments,  
 Now like a lonely flute ;  
 And now it is an angel's song,  
 Which makes the heavens be mute."

When the tale has reached its height of mystery and emotion, a change ensues ; gradually the greater spell is removed, the spirits depart, the strain softens—with a weird yet gentle progress the ship comes "slowly and smoothly," without a breeze, back to the known and visible. As the voyage approaches its conclusion, ordinary instrumentalities appear once more. There is first the rising of the soft familiar wind, "like a meadow gale in spring," then the blessed vision of the lighthouse-top, the hill, the kirk, all those well-known realities which gradually relieve the absorbed excitement of the listener, and favour his slow return to ordinary daylight. And then comes the ineffable half-childish, half-divine simplicity of those soft moralisings at the end, so strangely different from the tenor of the tale, so wonderfully perfecting its visionary strain. After all, the poet seems to say, after this weird excursion into the very deepest, awful heart of the seas and mysteries, here is your child's moral, a tender little half trivial sentiment, yet profound as the blue depths of heaven :—

"He prayeth best, who loveth best  
 All things both great and small ;  
 For the dear God who loveth us,  
 He made and loveth all."

This unexpected gentle conclusion brings our feet back to the common soil with a bewildered sweetness of



relief and soft quiet after the prodigious strain of mental excitement which is like nothing else we can remember in poetry. The effect is one rarely produced, and which few poets have the strength and daring to accomplish, sinking from the highest notes of spiritual music to the absolute simplicity of exhausted nature. Thus we are set down on the soft grass, in a tender bewilderment, out of the clouds. The visionary voyage is over, we are back again on the mortal soil from which we started; but never more, never again, can the visible and invisible bear to us the same meaning. For once in our lives, if never before, we have passed the borders of the unseen.

The same period which produced the "Ancient Mariner" produced also "Christabel," as much of it as was ever written. It is said that Coleridge had planned the second part of this poem, and meant to finish it, but it is well that his wayward indolence came in, backed for once by the voices of judicious friends. Charles Lamb was one of those who said the fragment should never be completed, and that is something the more which we owe our beloved Elia. This further investigation into the unknown was not published for years after, but it was read in the brotherhood, and known, from this happy and fertile period. It is a more distinct revelation than the other. /The first was, so to speak, introductory, an uplifting of the veil, the disclosure of a vast unseen world full of struggles and mysteries. ) The second is the distinct identification of a mystery of evil, an unseen harm and bane, working secretly in the dark places of the earth against white innocence, purity, and truth, and carrying on, with a new dread and awe, the continual conflict between good and evil. The poet does not stop to explain to us how this can be. Philosopher as he is to the depth of his soul, he is yet so much the more poet as to see that any theory of spiritual hate against the happiness of

earth would confuse the unity of his strain, and probably transfer our interest, as it has done in the "Paradise Lost," to the despairing spirit whose envy and enmity arise out of that hopeless majesty of wretchedness, great enough to be sublime, which devours his own soul. But Coleridge gives no reason for the hideous and terrible persecution of which his lovely maiden, "Christabel," symbolical even in name, is the object. The poem is a romance of Christianity—a legend of the saints. For no fault of hers, but rather for her virtues, are the powers of evil raised against her: and one of the most subtle and wonderful touches in the poem is that which makes us sensible of the ignorance of her innocence, her want of any knowledge or experience which can make her aware what the evil is, and how she is to deal with it. The witch Geraldine has all the foul wisdom of her wickedness to help her sorceries, her supernatural knowledge, her spells and cunning. But "Christabel" has nothing save her purity, and stands defenceless as a lamb, not even knowing what the danger is, exposed at every point in her simplicity, and paralysed, not instructed, by the first gleam of bewildering enlightenment. Never was there a higher or more beautiful conception. It is finer in its indefiniteness than the contrast of Una and Duessa, the pure and impure, the false and true, of a more elaborate allegory: Spenser, who lived in a more downright age, keeps himself within a narrower circle, and is compelled by his story to acts and deeds: but his very distinctness limits his power. The sorceress or disguised demon of Coleridge does not attempt to ruin her victim in any such uncompromising way. What she does is to throw boundless confusion into the gentle soul, to fill its limpid depths with fear and horror and distrust of all fair appearances, and even of itself—a still more appalling doubt: to undermine the sacred foundations of that love

and honour in which Christabel's very name is enshrined, and to establish herself, a subtle enemy, an antagonistic power, at the pure creature's side, turning her existence into chaos. Una is a foully slandered and innocent maiden, but Christabel is a martyr soul, suffering for her race, without knowing it, struggling in a dumb consternation against the evil that holds her spellbound. And all the more pathetic, all the more enthralling, is the picture, because the Christ-maiden is entirely human—too young, too childlike, even to understand the high mission which has fallen upon her. She knows nothing, neither her own position, a sight for angels to watch, nor all that depends upon her steadfast adherence to her white banner of religious faith and purity: but her enemy knows everything, and has an armoury of subtle spiritual weapons at her disposal: "Jesu Maria, shield her well!"

The contrast between the serene purity of the undisturbed soul and the confusion caused by her unconscious, unwilling contact with evil, is summed up in the following beautiful passage:—

"It was a lovely sight to see  
The Lady Christabel, when she  
Was praying at the old oak tree,  
Amid the jagged shadows  
Of mossy leafless boughs,  
Kneeling in the moonlight,  
To make her gentle vows;  
Her slender palms together prest,  
Heaving sometimes on her breast;  
Her face resigned to bliss or bale—  
Her face, oh call it fair not pale,  
And both blue eyes more bright than clear,  
Each about to have a tear.

"With open eyes (ah woe is me!)  
Asleep, and dreaming fearfully,  
Fearfully dreaming, yet I wis,  
Dreaming that alone, which is—

O sorrow and shame ! Can this be she,  
The lady, who knelt at the old oak tree ?  
And lo ! the worker of these harms,  
That holds the maiden in her arms,  
Seems to slumber still and mild,  
As a mother with her child.

A star hath set, a star hath risen,  
O Geraldine ! since arms of thine  
Have been the lovely lady's prison.  
O Geraldine ! one hour was thine—  
Thou'st had thy will ! By tairn and rill,  
The night-birds all that hour were still.  
But now they are jubilant anew,  
From cliff and tower, tu-whoo ! tu-whoo !  
Tu-whoo ! tu-whoo ! from wood and fell !  
And see ! the lady Christabel  
Gathers herself from out her trance ;  
Her limbs relax, her countenance  
Grows sad and soft ; the smooth thin lids  
Close o'er her eyes ; and tears she sheds—  
Large tears that leave the lashes bright !  
And oft the while she seems to smile  
As infants at a sudden light !  
Yea, she doth smile, and she doth weep,  
Like a youthful hermitess,  
Beauteous in a wilderness,  
Who, praying always, prays in sleep.  
And, if she move unquietly,  
Perchance, 'tis but the blood so free,  
Comes back and tingles in her feet.  
No doubt, she hath a vision sweet.  
What if her guardian spirit 'twere ?  
What if she knew her mother near ?  
But this she knows, in joys and woes,  
That saints will aid if men will call :  
For the blue sky bends over all !”

The first part, ending with the above lines, was written during this happy period at Nether Stowey ; the next, not till several years later, when the poet had removed to the north country, and the brotherhood had begun to be known as the “Lake Poets.” But it was not published

until long after, in 1816, when the public, who had allowed the "Ancient Mariner" to slip into existence with very little notice, gave to this wonderful fragment such a reception as few poems have had. There was no doubt nor hesitation about it. Cottle tells us that Wordsworth attributed the failure of the "Lyrical Ballads" to the appearance of the "Ancient Mariner," which nobody understood; but it continued to hold its place in the next edition, which appeared in 1800, with a preface in which Wordsworth set forth his theories of poetry, and in two other successive editions. The fine poem called "Love," one of those which we place most willingly by the side of the "Mariner" and "Christabel," was also included in the second edition.

Notwithstanding the unsuccess of this volume, the universal ridicule with which it was received, and the very inadequate idea of Wordsworth's genius given by it there was, after its publication, very little real question about the rank of these two brother poets. How this should have come about it is difficult to say. It happens sometimes that under the great outcry of indignation or dislike, raised by a certain work or act, there is a subtle indescribable deposit left by its mere contact with the mind of the reader, which is the foundation of the fullest and truest fame. No better example could be than this first work of the new brotherhood. The effect was unequal, but that does not diminish its singularity: though we think Coleridge was far better represented in it than Wordsworth, yet the publication had no such effect upon the reputation of the author of the "Ancient Mariner" as upon that of his coadjutor. Wordsworth was the special object of assault on all hands, but his poetical fortune was made. When the book was republished, the copyright of which had been given back to him as worthless, it was no longer an unbroken phalanx of angry or

indignant critics which he found before him. Here and there a young outlooker on some watch-tower had seen the light on the skies, and recognised whence it came. He got nothing but abuse for his first publication, but yet, in some strange way, it became his stepping-stone to fame.

The second edition contained two series of poems, which every lover of Wordsworth turns to instinctively, as perhaps the most exquisite of his minor productions. These are the poems which reveal "Lucy"—she of whom Nature vowed to make "a lady of her own"—she, who "dwelt among the untrodden ways, besides the springs of Dove," the most refined, yet most simple of all the half-revealed dreams of poetry. Five little poems are all we have of her. If she were a real being, or only an imagination, no one can tell; but the little casket of gems, in which her gentle name is enshrined, is pure and divine as the stars themselves, though the poems are artless as so many wild flowers. Here, indeed, the poet has arrived at his aim of producing the very highest effect by the simplest means—yet not as he meant to do it: for his subject is no grotesque embodiment of lowly love, but a creature belonging to the order of the Juliets and Desdemonas, the lawful ladies of our fancy. The consecration and the pathos of her story, which is no story, is almost more sacred, indeed, than that of these queens of the imagination—for it is wrapped round about in a pensive, yet penetrating sadness, devoid either of hope or passion. She is dead before we so much as hear of her. When her lover, riding towards her cottage, sees the waning moon go down, and gloom come over that humble roof, his heart is struck with an ominous foreboding—

"What fond and wayward thoughts will slide  
Into a lover's head!—  
'O mercy!' to myself I cried,  
'If Lucy should be dead!'"

Another step, another little broken outburst of simplest song, and we know that the foreboding has come true—

“She lived unknown, and few could know  
When Lucy ceased to be ;  
But she is in her grave, and, oh,  
The difference to me !”

Never were words more simple, more everyday ; and yet it is hard to read them without tears ; impossible, if the reader's life has ever held a Lucy of its own. Without passion, with no outcry even, more strong than this sense of want, it is heartrending in its quiet despair. The conclusion of all, which touches even patriotism to a deeper tone, we may quote entire. There is the very soul of chastened sorrow and profoundest melancholy faithfulness in every word—

“I travelled among unknown men,  
In lands beyond the sea ;  
Nor, England ! did I know, till then  
What love I bore to thee.

“'Tis past, that melancholy dream !  
Nor will I quit thy shore  
A second time ; for still I seem  
To love thee more and more.

“Among thy mountains did I feel  
The joy of my desire ;  
And she I cherished turned her wheel  
Beside an English fire.

“Thy mornings showed, thy nights concealed  
The bowers where Lucy played ;  
And thine, too, is the last green field  
That Lucy's eyes surveyed.”

This wonderful little record of a love and grief unknown, was made in Germany, where the poet had spent a dreary winter. To ourselves it is impossible to imagine that these poems had not a reference to some real history

of the heart; but there is no indication of any such thing in Wordsworth's life. The exquisite pathos and power with which the story is conveyed to us was perhaps purposely marred by the poet himself, who separated the verses, according to some solemn fantasy of his own, into different classifications. We are glad to see that Mr. Matthew Arnold, in his recent selection from Wordsworth, has put them together, and permitted them at last to tell their own tale.

And by the side of "Lucy" unknown, we place another figure of a different kind, no more than an old schoolmaster—the Matthew, whose name on a village tablet calls forth the poet's tender exclamation—

“—Thou soul of God's best earthly mould!  
Thou happy Soul! and can it be  
That these two words of glittering gold  
Are all that must remain of thee?”

The "Two April Mornings," and "The Fountain" contain this humble wayfarer as in some magic globe of crystal. They are so beautiful that the mere thought of them is like a strain of music. If Wordsworth had no more than these to build his fame upon, he would yet be sure of immortality. The suggestion of a noble human creature, "a man of mirth," one whose very tears "were tears of light, the dew of gladness," yet by whom the mood of "still and serious thought" was "felt with spirit so profound," is such as, perhaps, no one else, in so brief a space, and with so little aid of circumstance, could have given. It is impossible to refrain from setting this gem of purest ray serene in the humble framework of this page. Not only literature, but life is the better for anything so exquisite—

."We walked along, while bright and red  
Uprose the morning sun;



And Matthew stopped, he looked and said,  
'The will of God be done !'

" A village Schoolmaster was he,  
With hair of glittering gray ;  
As blithe a man as you could see  
On a spring holiday.

" And on that morning, through the grass  
And by the steaming rills,  
We travelled merrily, to pass  
A day among the hills.

" ' Our work,' said I, ' was well begun',  
Then, from thy breast what thought,  
Beneath so beautiful a sun,  
So sad a sigh has brought ?'

" A second time did Matthew stop ;  
And fixing still his eye  
Upon the eastern mountain-top,  
To me he made reply :

" ' Yon cloud with that long purple cleft  
Brings fresh into my mind  
A day like this which I have left  
Full thirty years behind.

" ' And just above yon slope of corn  
Such colours, and no other,  
Where in the sky, that April morn,  
Of this the very brother.

" ' With rod and line I sued the sport  
Which that sweet season gave,  
And, coming to the church, stopped short  
Beside my daughter's grave.

" ' Nine summers had she scarcely seen,  
The pride of all the vale ;  
And then she sang ;—she would have been  
A very nightingale.

" ' Six feet in earth my Emma lay ;  
And yet I loved her more,  
For so it seemed, than till that day  
I e'er had loved before.

“ ‘ And, turning from her grave, I met,  
Beside the churchyard yew,  
A blooming girl, whose hair was wet  
With points of morning dew.

“ ‘ A basket on her head she bare ;  
Her brow was smooth and white :  
To see a child so very fair,  
It was a pure delight !

“ ‘ No fountain from its rocky cave  
E’er tripped with foot so free ;  
She seemed as happy as a wave  
That dances on the sea.

“ ‘ There came from me a sigh of pain  
Which I could ill confine ;  
I looked at her, and looked again :  
—And did not wish her mine.’

“ Matthew is in his grave, yet now,  
Methinks, I see him stand,  
As at that moment, with a bough  
Of wilding in his hand.”

Wordsworth has for the present, perhaps, passed the height of his fame. He is less universally appreciated, less beloved, than he was twenty years ago. The failure can only be temporary, but it is grief to those to whom he stands like his own mountains, a glory and power, to catch the echo of a gibe from unlikely quarters now-a-days, repeating the gibes with which the eighteenth century, while it lay a-dying, feebly mocked at the innovation. But even that old century, on the verge of the grave, and with the mock on its bloodless lips, began to feel before it died that the new poet was too many for it, with all its powers of ridicule, and with all the opportunities for their exercise which he gave so boldly. The “ Lyrical Ballads,” at which every toothless critic sneered, and upon which the new gladiators of literature all fleshed their swords, was nevertheless, as he intended, the sure

foundation of the poet's fame. He insisted, notwithstanding all the jests, that this and no other should be the first stone, and by sheer strength of genius and strength of will, succeeded, unlikely though it seemed.

Such were the two young poets who, after all preludes and symphonies were completed, opened a new and noble chapter, a great era, of poetry in England. Wordsworth brought to the sweet, and fair, and real English landscape, rediscovered with all its genial breezes and wholesome freshness by Cowper, his own deeply reasoning spirit, full of a lofty perception of the mysteries, and sorrows, and doubts, of nature, and a high sympathetic philosophical faculty for the solution of these doubts and mysteries. Instead of the stale moralities and reflections of which the world had grown so weary, he brought back to human nature that high vindication of the ways of God to man which Milton and his angels had held in Eden, and taking—what mattered the outside?—a poet or a peasant indifferently, expounded the agency of human sorrows in the economy of life, and put forth his hand to grasp “the far-off interest of tears.”—Coleridge, on the other hand, opened up all that mystic world of suggestion in which the human spirit lives conscious but bewildered, “the world not realised,” the wonderful unknown to which no soul is a stranger, which no man has ever interpreted, but which, breathing mysteriously upon us in tremors of the blood and thrills of spiritual curiosity, attracts more or less every conscious soul. The mystic wanderer who has lived among the dead, and carries about the world the burden of his strange punishment: the undisclosed secret of that darkness out of which the lady who is “beautiful exceedingly,” the “angel beautiful and bright,” who is nevertheless a fiend, glides suddenly when the victim thinks no evil: and all the powers of the heights and the depths thus came

back upon the world which had forgotten any spiritual creatures more entrancing or mysterious than the Nymphs and Muses, and those little vulgar spirits that managed Belinda's petticoat. New voices were yet to rise, and new lights to appear, in the firmament before the epoch was accomplished, but it had come to its full and splendid beginning, with all its paths made straight and all its foundations laid, when Wordsworth and Coleridge published the "Lyrical Ballads," and came forth from their solitudes upon the world.

In poetry Coleridge made no advance upon the work of those early days. His philosophy did not affect the world as his poetry did, notwithstanding the glamour of impression rather than influence which it produced afterwards, or which his personal presence and discourse produced, when he was no longer young, upon those who were. It will, however, demand notice elsewhere. With Wordsworth the result of years was very different. When he settled in his native north country at Grasmere, and finally at Rydal, where he lived the greater part of his life, and died an old man, it was with the settled intention of devoting himself and all his powers to poetry, and the records of the earlier portion of this retired life are entirely poetical. His sister was still his sole and constant companion, and her diary, full of many gleams of poetic description and insight, is yet an almost matter-of-fact account of incidents which her keen eyes and ready perception noted, or which friends related to the steady and diligent workman, whose whole soul was bent upon his noble trade, and who immediately made use of the material, and reproduced it in verse. They met upon the road "an old man bent nearly double," whose trade it was to gather leeches—and straightway "William wrote the 'Leech-Gatherer,'" one of the noblest of his lesser poems; or Dorothy encountered a party of

wandering beggars—parents and children ; or “ we saw a few daffodils close to the waterside.” Nothing was neglected between them ; no unusual effect either of mind or matter, no incident of life, but found a place. These swallow flights of song, however, were not enough to satisfy the conscientious mind of the man who had determined not only to be a poet, but a great one, and who felt the pressure of his mission upon him. Wordsworth was a lover of system and theory. The wild simplicities of the Lyrical Ballads, as we have seen, were all severely resolved upon, and he was now not less, but more, bent upon impressing his poetical creed upon the world. He began, therefore, as soon as he had settled himself in the north, to look about him for a subject great enough for his handling, and very soon came to the decision, with something of the large and lofty egotism which was one of the inspirations of his life, that nothing more profoundly interesting than the “ history of his own mind ” could be given to the world. He describes his intention, and all the farspreading results that were to follow, with a sort of simple grandiloquence, in his preface to the “ Excursion,” published in 1814.

“ When the Author retired to his native mountains with the hope of being able to construct a literary Work that might live, it was a reasonable thing that he should take a review of his own mind, and examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him for such employment. As subsidiary to this preparation, he undertook to record, in verse, the origin and progress of his own powers, as far as he was acquainted with them. That Work, addressed to a dear Friend, most distinguished for his knowledge and genius, and to whom the Author's Intellect is deeply indebted, . . . and the result of the investigation which gave rise to it was a determination to compose a philosophical poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society, and to be entitled the ‘ Recluse ; ’ as having for its principal subject the sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement. The preparatory poem is biographical, and conducts the history of the Author's mind to the point when

he was emboldened to hope that his faculties were sufficiently matured for entering upon the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself; and the two Works have the same kind of relation to each other, if he may so express himself, as the antechapel has to the body of a Gothic church. Continuing this allusion, he may be permitted to add that his minor Pieces, . . . when they shall be properly arranged, will be found by the attentive Reader to have such connection with the main Work, as may give them claim to be likened to the little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses ordinarily included in those edifices."

The artificial solemnity of this scheme, given forth with a sublime unconsciousness of all possibilities of derision, is not, perhaps, more remarkable than the arrogant humility of the theories with which the Lyrical Ballads were issued to the world. Never was there a more curious demonstration of the foolishness of wisdom. He who proclaimed himself as the emancipator of the poetic art would have fitted her into the most rigid machinery if he could have had his will, and the elaborate system in which every part was adapted to the other, and all together were to form a temple of glory great as Solomon's own, and worthy to be the centre of earth, was almost more dear to him than the poetry itself, though that was the breath of his nostrils. But nature which loves no such elaboration, and wayward genius which scorns machinery, and human liking which will none of it, had the better of Wordsworth. He had vanquished the age with his Lyrical Ballads, returning again and again to the charge with the selfsame weapon, till his despised arms had won the battle; but not even his obstinate valour and steady pertinacity could achieve this second triumph. Poetry blew away his systems like the mere foam of fancy they were. No one, even among his worshippers, has thought of his work as of a "Gothic church." Most people whose opinion is worth having—backed by that general multitude which pretends to

little discrimination, yet has a commanding instinct superior to criticism—would rather lose both “Excursion” and “Prelude,” than consent to part with the “Leech-Gatherer,” or that great “Ode” which also belongs to these peaceful prefatory years. Even Wordsworth’s enormous force of will, united to his genius, could not succeed in making the history of a poet’s mind a subject of absorbing interest to the world. But he himself must have so far felt this that he never carried out his majestic intention. The “Prelude” was indeed finished, but it was not given to the world till after Wordsworth’s death, when it was received with the reverential respect due to a posthumous work from such a hand, but not with any enthusiasm of appreciation. The friend to whom it was addressed was Coleridge, who speaks of it with rapturous admiration, declaring that this dedication was the only thing in the world which could give him an hour’s vanity; and perhaps the warmest, certainly the most touching, link of human interest which we have with the poem is the effect it produced upon him when, on his return from Malta in 1806, the completed manuscript was read to him by his friend. By that time he had entered upon the downward part of his career. Bad health, combined, no doubt, with the restlessness of a mind unsatisfied, and a conscience already sick and burdened with weakness it could not overcome, had sent him away wandering in search of health and peace two years before. At Malta he had fallen fortuitously into public employment, which gave some meaning to his detention, but he was uneasy and restless under these bonds as under all other. When he arrived in England, after this long absence, his first visit was to the Wordsworths at Coleorton, the house of Sir George Beaumont; and here it was that this poetical autobiography, full of so many noble passages, and at all points overflowing with

interest to Wordsworth's contemporary and brother-in-arms, was read to him. Coleridge was greatly moved. He felt the contrast to his very heart : his friend had gone steadily and solemnly on in his career, and seemed now sure of that starry crown of immortality which, a little while before, had appeared more near Coleridge's head than his ; while he had dropped away into ways which were not ways of blessedness, into a melancholy oblivion of his own highest aims and powers. It is not difficult to imagine what must have been the thoughts of the worn and weary traveller, conscious of many a slip and back-sliding. How different the situation then from their conjunction at the time of which the poem had just reminded him, when, from "Quantock's airy ridge" the entire world of life and poetry lay at the feet of the two brethren in genius. In the stillness of the summer night, the unfortunate, the unsuccessful, the erring and suffering wanderer, addressed his friend in lines which betray the swelling of a full heart. "An Orphic song indeed," he cries—

"A song divine, of high and passionate thoughts  
To their own music chanted !"

He gazes upon the writer with a new-born awe, viewing him "in the choir of ever-enduring men," one of those "truly great" who—

"Have all one age, and from one visible space  
Shed influence !"

But he himself, the poet's peer and comrade, how strangely, how sadly different, how deeply departed from their common aims !

"Ah ! as I listened with a heart forlorn,  
The pulses of my being beat anew :  
And even as life returns upon the drowned  
Life's joy rekindling roused a throng of pains,



Keen pangs of love, awakening as a babe,  
Turbulent with an outcry in the heart ;  
And fears self-willed that shunned the eye of hope,  
And hope that scarce would know itself from fear :  
Sense of past youth, and manhood come in vain,  
And genius given and knowledge won in vain ;  
And all which I had culled in woodwalks wild,  
And all which patient toil had reared, and all,  
Commune with thee had opened out—but flowers  
Strewed on my corse, and borne upon my bier,  
In the same coffin, for the self same grave ! ”

The growth of a poet's mind, developing itself serene and lofty, amid all the still and sublime influences of virtue and domestic calm, affords room for many an elevated thought: but as long as humanity is as now, this other figure coming in, no conqueror but sadly worsted in the life-battle, his bosom strained with a sob of self-compassion, yet generous voice of enthusiasm, proclaiming the triumph of the victor, will gain from us a very different regard. Wordsworth in his self-determined greatness has our respect and admiration, but it is with that anguish of sympathy which stirs the very depths of our being, that we turn to the other, with his weird and wonderful insight into the mysteries of creation, and his helpless incapacity to hold his own against the vulgarest forces of evil. The contrast is heartrending yet ever-recurring. And it is one of the most affecting of compensations, that the soul which fails in the fight should so often possess that magnanimity and generous power of appreciation which Coleridge thus manifested. We cannot but doubt whether Wordsworth, the pure and strong, had he failed like his brother, could have borne the comparison with anything like the same noble candour and humility.

The “Prelude,” perhaps, was too long delayed to have its due effect upon the public mind. In 1850 which

was the date of its publication, the French Revolution, and all the convulsions which attended it, were so far away, and the feelings of hope, of wonder, of dismay, with which its progress was watched, had by that time fallen too entirely into the calm of historical contemplation to stir the lively sympathy of the reader: but the value of the poem as a picture of the mental history of the period can scarcely be over-estimated. The philosophical yet sympathetic spectator, curious, anxious, and full of the deepest interest, watching the historic scroll roll out before him with all a contemporary's certainty of understanding, yet bewildered half knowledge of those hieroglyphics which only Time interprets fully—elucidates, if not the stirring story of the time, yet his own generation, with all its hopes and aspirations and disappointments, better than any other historian has done. It is not, however, to this part of the record that the poetical reader will turn, but to the earlier scenes, the poet's childhood among his "native mountains," his schoolboy feats and adventures—still Esthwaite, in the midst of its valley, "the moon in splendour couched among the leaves of a tall ash that near our cottage stood," and these questionings of nature and silence which arose in the heart of the growing boy. This schoolboy story is full of the freshness of the mountains, and the thrill of simple life and nature. Perhaps a picture more vivid and real, yet more finely imaginative, was never drawn than that of the frozen lake and the band of boyish skaters careless of the summons to home and the fireside which "the cottage windows blazed through twilight gloom."

. . "not a voice was idle : with the din  
Smitten, the precipices rang aloud ;  
The leafless trees and every icy crag  
Tinkled like iron ; while far distant hills

Into the tumult sent an alien sound  
Of melancholy, not unnoticed, while the stars,  
Eastward, were sparkling clear, and in the west  
The orange sky of evening died away.  
Not seldom from the uproar I retired  
Into a silent bay,—or sportively  
Glanced sideways, leaving the tumultuous throng,  
To cut across the reflex of a star  
That fled, and, flying still before me, gleamed  
Upon the glassy plain ; and oftentimes,  
When we had given our bodies to the wind,  
And all the shadowy banks on either side  
Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still  
The rapid line of motion, then at once  
Have I, reclining back upon my heels,  
Stopped short ; yet still the solitary cliffs  
Wheeled by me—even as if the earth had rolled  
With visible motion her diurnal round !  
Behind me did they stretch in solemn train,  
Feebler and feebler, and I stood and watched  
Till all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep.”

It would be impossible to find a description more true to fact, yet more instinct with the wonder and the mystery of existence and this “world not realised,” which is its scene.

The “Excursion,” which is the only part of the proposed great poem of the “Recluse” which got into being, was published in 1814, while the controversies, excited by the “Lyrical Ballads,” were still in force. And though the poet had by that time a devoted band of disciples, and had so far conquered public attention that nothing could come from his hand which the critics dared venture to neglect, yet the treatment of this long poem was not much more genial than that with which its predecessors had been entertained. Jeffrey, to his own confusion, hailed it, as everybody knows, with that, “This will never do,” which has served the world for an example of light-hearted audacity ever since. We are

doubtful, however, whether, had it been published now, even the more wary critics of our own days, warned by such examples, might not have given a very similar verdict. No poem so long, so monotonous, and at the same time so unequal, was ever popular. That there are many passages in it of the noblest poetry does not in any way affect this fact; and both in its nobleness and in its heaviness, the atmosphere was too elevated for common man. Without the relief of story, or of any variety of character, with nothing but the highest rarefied air of the mountains about the three or four austere philosophical figures reasoning among themselves of the ways of God to man, nothing was left to attract the lighter part of nature, or to beguile the careless reader into the high fare thus set before him. We doubt if the lowliness of the chief character, the still half-ostentatious selection of the trade of pedlar to distinguish him, was half the drawback it was supposed to be; but the unbroken gravity of the strain, its lofty dialogue almost entirely occupied with the philosophy of sorrow,—that lofty and abstruse argument by which the poet and the creatures of his fancy endeavour to prove the advantages to humanity of individual grief and misfortune,—touched only here and there a note to which the heart could respond. The first book contains a picture of extraordinary pathos and power, from which it results that there are many who know the story of Margaret, just as there are many who are acquainted with the episode of Paolo and Francesca in the *Inferno*, without venturing farther in a way too high for them. This story has furnished English poetry with one of the most touching pictures of the anguish of suspense and the long heart-breaking vigil of vain expectation, to be found in any language. The wistful, patient woman sitting at her cottage door, with her long scrutinising gaze directed

along the vacant road, her eyes "busy in the distance, shaping things that make her heart beat quick," her habitual pause in her work to give another and another glance to that vacancy out of which the beloved, long-looked-for wanderer might at any moment come,—her infant that "from its mother caught the trick of grief and sighed among its playthings,"—her wide wanderings afield when her heart grew too sick to rest, and the gradual desperate yielding of heart and hope, of comfort and all its outside semblances—are placed before us with a reality of sadness which is heartrending. This figure appears in the foreground of the picture with a humble majesty of woe which recalls the cry of another sufferer—

"Here I and Sorrow sit ;  
This is my throne, let kings come bow to it."

There is no other figure in the poem so real or so fine. The Priest and the Pedlar, who join in the excursion of the poet by the village churchyard and among the surrounding hills, are but so many Wordsworths taking up the different tones of his argument—the Solitary a feeble objector, equally philosophical, whose bitterness is made to be overcome. How evil itself can be turned to good, how the great patience of suffering ennobles the earth and the race, and how all that is painful passes away, leaving an immortal tranquillity and confidence as the supreme mood of nature, is the argument of the whole. It is a very lofty argument, worth a poet's while ; but it is hard to seize, and needs a mind of kindred peacefulness and faith. When the poet has heard Margaret's melancholy story his heart goes out towards her in all the tenderness of sympathy. "It seemed," he says,

"To comfort me, while with a brother's love  
I blessed her in the impotence of grief."

He feels himself solaced and strengthened by this flood of natural feeling. The tale of grief impresses and solemnises his own soul.

"Then towards the cottage I returned ; and traced  
Fondly, though with an interest more mild,  
That secret spirit of humanity  
Which, 'mid the calm oblivious tendencies  
Of nature, 'mid her plants, and weeds, and flowers,  
And silent overgrowings, still survived.  
The old Man, noting this, resumed, and said,  
'My Friend ! enough to sorrow you have given,  
The purposes of wisdom ask no more :

She sleeps in the calm earth, and peace is here.  
I well remember that those very plumes,  
Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall.  
By mist and silent rain-drops silvered o'er,  
As once I passed into my heart conveyed  
So still an image of tranquillity,  
So calm and still, and looked so beautiful  
Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind  
That what we feel of sorrow and despair  
From ruin and from change, and all the grief  
That passing shows of Being leave behind,  
Appeared an idle dream, that could maintain,  
Nowhere, dominion o'er the enlightened spirit  
Whose meditative sympathies repose  
Upon the breast of Faith. I turned away,  
And walked along my road in happiness."

In all his mature work this is always the lesson which Wordsworth labours to enforce. Perhaps the early shock given to his mind by the failure of the visionary hopes, of which France was the centre, first turned his deeply searching and patient intelligence to draw some sort of goodness, if he could, out of things evil—and as his mind ripened and occupied itself more and more with the great questions of human life, the so frequent failure of all hopes, the incessant disappointments and miseries of men, this was the consolation which he gathered to

himself: that sorrow was temporary but peace eternal, and that Nature's continual work is to bind up wounds and cover over graves. This constant process of renovation and the perpetual survival of the general calm, whatsoever may be the adversities of the individual, which appals the minds of some observers, and makes Nature, in their eyes, a cruel automaton altogether indifferent to the fortunes of mankind, was to Wordsworth a sacred and hopeful patience, an assurance of that everlasting composure and satisfaction that is in the bosom of God. It is easier, perhaps, to give to this doctrine a large adhesion, and to preach it to men, when the soul of the speaker dwells in peace as Wordsworth's did, and disappointment and calamity do not come his way. But it is a noble burden of prophecy; and nowhere could it have had a fitter atmosphere than in that presence of the hills which pervades this great poem. The mountains are all about us, as we read, raising their great shadows against the sky, opening out into blue distance, with many a misty peak, and half-seen valley, or closing in the scene with serried rank of cliff on cliff, and rock piled above rock—

“The silence that is in the starry sky,  
The sleep that is among the lonely hills,”

an air chill and pure; a sweep of uncontaminated wind, the hush of half-heard streams, and inarticulate movement spread all about. This sentiment of the mountains is in itself a poem, and the “Excursion” is instinct with it. The long reasonings, the over-serious argument, may weary the reader, but even the most careless will find that he has been swept away into a land of mists and mountains, amid influences of the clouds and winds, and lyric outbursts of sunshine and light, such as come nowhere else. It is more than descriptive poetry. The

poet's intense realisation of those beloved landscapes carries us with him into the very bosom of his hills.

But of all the poems to which this wonderful season of fruitfulness gave birth, perhaps the one which we would least willingly let die is the "Ode"—to which we hardly require to add its long-sounding descriptive title, "On the Intimations of Immortality." Most of the other odes in the English language are prized for their fidelity to the rules of an exotic production, but no one has any leisure to think of Strophe or Antistrophe, when this divinest utterance of modern poetry carries him away on its sea of silver melody and wondrous thought. The child, the new-born creature, unfamiliar with earth "trailing clouds of glory" from the unknown whence he came, and feeling all about him a world not realised, the dangerous deadly sphere in which he is to play out the part which, with a thousand joyous mockeries and gleams of bewildering insight, he rehearses unawares—stands out before us, the tenderest unconscious hero of humankind. Never was there so wonderful a picture drawn all in lines of light: and never were thoughts so profound revealed in a more limpid strain of perfect poetry. If it may be permitted to bring in a personal recollection, the writer can scarcely refrain from recalling the silent uncommunicated rapture with which this wonderful poem swept into her mind in the early years, when feeling is more near the infinite than maturity can realise. Books were not to be had in those days at every corner, and she still retains, with a half-amused, half-regretful tenderness, a little sheaf of yellow leaflets, how carefully written out! containing the "Ode" which was a revelation of inconceivable beauty and emotion.

"The thought of our past years in me doth breed  
Perpetual benediction : not indeed  
For that which is most worthy to be blest ;



Delight and liberty, the simple creed  
Of childhood, whether busy or at rest,  
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast :—  
    Not for these I raise  
    The song of thanks and praise ;  
    But for those obstinate questionings  
    Of sense and outward things,  
    Fallings from us, vanishings ;  
    Blank misgivings of a Creature  
Moving about in worlds not realised,  
High instincts before which our mortal Nature  
Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised :  
    But for those first affections,  
    Those shadowy recollections,  
    Which, be they what they may,  
Are yet the fountain light of all our day,  
Are yet a master light of all our seeing ;  
    Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make  
Our noisy years seem moments in the being  
Of the eternal Silence : truths that wake,  
    To perish never ;  
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,  
    Nor Man nor Boy,  
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,  
Can utterly abolish or destroy !  
    Hence in a season of calm weather,  
    Though inland far we be,  
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea  
    Which brought us hither  
    Can in a moment travel thither,  
And see the children sport upon the shore,  
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.”

Wordsworth lived a gentle, retired, and dignified life among his “ native mountains ” from this time forward. He was what so few poets are—or perhaps it is more just to say were—prosperous and well off during all the rest of his life ; his own steadfast and determined nature forcing, one might almost think, the gifts of the external world, as well as that full acknowledgment of his genius which his age was at first so unwilling to give. The reader who loves Wordsworth will, in most cases, prefer

not to read his own commentaries upon himself, a subject upon which he was too solemnly eloquent; and we have already endeavoured to point out in what way the poetical theories with which he began his life were strained and unnatural. He kept to them in so far as to make the hero of his longest poem a Pedlar; but the language of the "Excursion" is as far from the bald simplicity which he recommended at the outset, as it is possible to imagine; and that poem, as well as the "Prelude," is markedly addressed, not to the "huts where poor men lie," but to a specially elect and chosen audience—the few who are able to appreciate efforts so continuous and lofty.

We refrain from any criticism of the poems on classical subjects which, by some critics, are invested, it seems to us, with an entirely undue importance, principally because they *are* upon classical subjects—those themes which have been proclaimed so well and so much by their own poets as to leave little inducement, we think, for their re-treatment by the sons of an age so remote and so different. The "Laodameia," however beautiful, shows none of the characteristic qualities of Wordsworth, and it is Wordsworth, and not an abstract poet, whom we are here to deal with. Neither shall we attempt to wade through the waste of sonnets in which, with painfully systematic zeal, he has expressed a multitude of sentiments, not very original, upon various subjects. Some dozen of these are worthy of the highest rank, and will recur at once to the recollection of the reader; the rest we would willingly dispense with altogether. But our venerated poet was no critic. He had a certain religious regard for his work, whatever it was, and sometimes liked the worst best, with a simplicity of human foolishness which might endear his wisdom to us, if it were not uncomfortably mixed with that solemn egotism which was his greatest defect.

Wordsworth lived to be acknowledged the greatest living name in literature, and at the end of his life he received that graceful tribute of public honour, the laureateship, which before then had been soiled by much ignoble use, but which Southey had gathered out of the mud, and which has been actually as well as formally, the meed of the greatest since then. He lived a prosperous, and serene, and untroubled life until the end, when natural sorrows clouded over "the eye which had kept watch o'er man's mortality." When it came to be his turn to see his best-beloved go to the grave before him, the poet bore his sorrows with a noble and touching patience. He died in April 1850, the last of the great brotherhood—at once of his own companions and of the younger band who, among them, had raised the end of one century and the beginning of the next, into a great poetic age—one of the greatest in English history; he survived all, as he was in many respects the greatest and most influential of all—the strongest nature and the most steadfast soul.

Of Coleridge we can make no such record. While Wordsworth was devoting himself to his great art, in determined withdrawal from everything that he thought likely to debase or distract his mind, Coleridge was wandering uneasily from place to place, seldom appearing *in the spot which he had chosen as his home. His health was the reason commonly alleged, and it is added by some that the constant society of so well-regulated and orderly a companion as Southey, was more than this much-proposing and little-accomplishing soul could bear.* But at least he was constantly absent: for two years in Malta, as has been seen; at other times in different parts of England; sometimes in London, fitfully engaging in newspaper work; neither well nor happy at any time; falling daily more and more under the sway of a deadly

habit; losing hope, and courage, and self-respect; a sort of discrowned king, never without the signs of inalienable royalty, but without a subject, even in himself; with all his learning wasted, and all his wonderful faculties running to seed. In 1809 we find him at Grasmere, under the inspiring influence of Wordsworth, and there he published, through the hands of a local bookseller, *The Friend*, a little weekly periodical, in which his own fine and abstruse thinkings, and the contributions of his brethren and immediate disciples in literature, made up a publication as entirely caviare to the general as ever issued from the press. It lived for some months, appearing at irregular intervals, and was, so far as popularity went, an entire failure, which, indeed, might have been looked for. In 1810 he finally left the Lakes and his family, returning to them no more. It was with Mr. Basil Montague, the genial friend and helper of so many men of letters, whose house and heart were open to generations of writers, from Godwin down to Carlyle, and who was not always recompensed by the gratitude of his guests, that Coleridge went to London, and he lived for some time in the house of this kind friend and brother, whose society and care were, no doubt, supposed likely to be salutary to the unfortunate poet. For the next half-dozen years we can follow Coleridge but dimly through the shadows of his unhappy life. Now and then he reappeared in the daylight, notably in 1813, when his tragedy "Remorse" was produced at Drury Lane. It had been submitted to Sheridan many years before, but had been by him laughed out of hearing. It was to Lord Byron now that its reception was owing. He, then in the height of his early popularity, a young demigod, beloved alike of fashion and genius, was all-influential in the theatre, for which, after the failure of the competition (which produced the genial mockery of the "Rejected

Addresses"), he had been requested to write an opening Ode—and was generally in the ascendant. He had libelled Coleridge in the "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," and was to do so again: but though he was so little qualified to judge the poet as to speak of the author of the "Ancient Mariner," as "to turgid ode and tumid stanza dear," yet his deeds were better than his words, and it was his generous interposition which procured this drama a hearing. "The success was immediate and decisive, and the play had a run of twenty nights;" then, to all appearance, it dropped from the stage, and was heard of no more. It was published, however, shortly afterwards, and a large number sold at once. During this period, too, Coleridge reappeared as a lecturer discoursing upon poetry—upon Shakspeare, and Milton, and the earlier dramatists—lectures which were attended by some eager auditors, intent on seeing, almost more than hearing, the poet, one of whom was young Keats. Crabb Robinson's account of these lectures is, however, entirely in keeping with the melancholy circumstances and mind of the poet. "I do hope he will have steadiness to go on with the lectures to the end. It would be so great a point gained if he could but pursue one object without interruption," a friend writes of him to this deeply concerned and interested spectator; and Robinson, in return, furnished a description of the curious irregularity and inequality of these performances. Of one, he says that Coleridge "surpassed himself in the art of talking in a very interesting way without speaking at all on the subject announced. According to advertisement, he was to lecture on 'Romeo and Juliet,' and Shakspeare's female characters. Instead of this, he began with a defence of school-flogging, in preference, at least, to Lancaster's mode of punishing, without pretending to find the least connection between that topic and poetry

. . . On another occasion, however, he declaimed with great eloquence about love without wandering from his subject. . . . As evidence of splendid talent, original thought, and rare powers of expression and fancy, they are all his admirers can wish ; but as a discharge of his undertaking, a fulfilment of his promise to the public, they give his friends great uneasiness." " He has about one hundred and fifty hearers on an average," says the same writer. Thus the light which was in him gleamed fitfully, showing chiefly its own eclipse. In 1814 he visited Bristol for the same purpose of delivering lectures, and there his unhappy condition aroused the pained and troubled comments of his faithful friend Cottle, he who had been the providence of his youth. It is very natural that Coleridge's family should have resented this good man's maunderings on so painful a subject : and yet it would have been a very unusual stretch of virtue had he refrained, and he had, he assures us, the injunction of Coleridge himself, always full of that facile but ineffectual penitence which rends the hearts of friends, always pious and desirous of affording help to his fellow-creatures, to justify the publication of the poet's own melancholy letter as a warning and an example to others. In 1816 this painful period of his life came to an end, and he was received into the house of Mr. Gillman at Highgate, who treated him at once as a medical attendant and devoted friend, and procured him some comfort and tranquillity in the later years of his life. His " Christabel " was published only at this period ; but it had been so well known in literary circles before,—so often read, recited, and quoted,—that its final introduction to the public seems but an insignificant incident in the story of this wonderful poem. It had instant and immense acceptance among all who loved poetry. The easy strain, the facile verse, which Scott had so brilliantly, yet so simply,

introduced, and which almost every poet of the age had used more or less, came to its apotheosis in this mystic and lovely spiritual romance. The "consecration and the poet's dream;" the "light that never was on sea and land," had at last penetrated through and through this artless web of poetry and given it its highest development. During these latter years in the sheltered retreat at Highgate, where he was at least free from the storms and shames of an unhappy existence, Coleridge collected and published several volumes, and in 1828 an entire edition of his poetical works; but all his finest utterances belong to the period of his early intercourse with Wordsworth. "The Ancient Mariner," "Christabel," and that exquisite poem called "Love," which of all the others is, perhaps, the one which his true disciples like the best, belong to these all-golden and hopeful morning hours. Had he never written a line in poetry after the beginning of the century, it would not have materially affected his fame. His "Biographia Literaria," and several of his philosophical works, belonged to the painful period, between 1810 and 1816, when his fortunes were at the lowest, and his life the saddest. These were published after he had reached the final haven of his declining days.

There is, however, no aspect of Coleridge's life so well known to the public as that of his later life at Highgate—we cannot call it his old age, for he died at sixty-two on the edge only of that period. There, in his seclusion, he drew all manner of intelligences towards him; enthusiastic young men went out to sit at his feet—Edward Irving, John Sterling—the former taking with him a certain young Scotsman in the rough husk of a genius still undeveloped, future preacher of Hero-worship, but in himself little addicted to that religion, and judging all things with a sort of relentless Gothic eyesight, intolerant of all that was unusual to him. But

Carlyle's description of the poet-sage, if not reverential, is in all its circumstances more picturesque and vivid than any other we can supply to the reader. "Coleridge," he says, "sat on the brow of Highgate Hill in those years, looking down on London and its smoke-tumult like a sage escaped from the inanity of life's battle, attracting towards him the thoughts of innumerable brave souls still engaged there." He of whom Southey first of all, and afterwards the Wordsworths, and such differing witnesses as gossip Mr. Cottle in his Bristol shop, and young Hazlitt acute and bitter, had but one word to say in the days of his strength—that never man had produced such an impression of infinite faculty and many-sided soul—appeared under a different light to the natural scepticism, the half-defiant, all-inquiring gaze of the young and stubborn Scot. He continues:—

"He was thought to hold, he alone in England, the key of German and other Transcendentalisms; knew the sublime secret of believing by the 'reason' what the 'understanding' had been obliged to fling out as incredible; and could still, after Hume and Voltaire had done their best and worst with him, profess himself an orthodox Christian, and say and print to the Church of England, with its singular old rubrics and surplices at Allhallowtide, *Esto Perpetua*. A sublime man; who alone in those dark days had saved his crown of spiritual manhood; escaping from the black materialisms and revolutionary deluges with 'God, Freedom, Immortality' still his: a king of men. The practical intellects of the world did not much heed him, or carelessly reckoned him a metaphysical dreamer; but to the rising spirits of the young generation he had this dusky sublime character, and sat there as a kind of Magus, girt in mystery and enigma: his Dodona oak-grove, Mr. Gillman's house at Highgate—whispering strange things, uncertain whether oracles or jargon. The Gillmans did not encourage much company or excitation of any sort round their sage; nevertheless, access to him, if a youth did reverently wish it, was not difficult. He would stroll about the pleasant garden with you, sit in the pleasant rooms of the place—perhaps take you to his own peculiar room high up, with a rearward view, which was the chief view of all. A really charming outlook in fine weather. Close at hand



wide sweep of flowery leafy gardens, their few houses mostly hidden, the very chimney pots veiled under blossomy umbrage, flowed gloriously down hill, gloriously issuing in wide-tufted undulating plain-country, rich in all charms of field and town. Waving blooming country of the brightest green, dotted all over with handsome villas, handsome groves, crossed by roads and human traffic here inaudible or heard only as a musical hum, and behind all, swam, under olive-tinted haze, the illimitable liminary ocean of London, with its domes and steeples definite in the sun, big Paul's and the many memories attached to it hanging high over all. Nowhere of its kind could you see a grander prospect on a bright summer day with the set of the air going southward—southward, and so draping with the city smoke not *you* but the city. Here for hours would Coleridge talk concerning all conceivable or inconceivable things; and liked nothing better than to have an intelligent, or failing that, even a silent and patient human listener. He distinguished himself to all that ever heard him as the most surprising talker extant in this world—and to some small minority, by no means to all, as the most excellent. The good man, he was now getting old, towards sixty perhaps; and gave you the idea of a life that had been full of sufferings; a life heavy laden, half vanquished, still swimming painfully in seas of manifold physical and other bewilderment. Brow and head were round and of massive weight, but the face was flabby and irresolute. The deep eyes of a light hazel were as full of sorrow as of inspiration; confused pain looked mildly from them, as in a kind of mild astonishment. . . . I have heard Coleridge talk with eager musical energy two stricken hours, his face radiant and moist, and communicate no meaning whatsoever to any individual of his hearers, certain of whom, I for one, still kept eagerly listening in hope; the most had long before given up and formed, if the room were large enough, secondary humming groups of their own. . . . You swam and fluttered in the mistiest, wide, unintelligible deluge of things, for most part in a rather profitless uncomfortable manner. Glorious islets too I have seen rise out of the haze; but they were few, and soon swallowed in the general element again. Balmy sunny islets, islets of the blest and the intelligible;—on which occasions those secondary humming groups would all cease humming and hang breathless upon the eloquent words, till once your islet got wrapt in the mist again, and they would recommence humming. Eloquent, artistically expressive words you always had; piercing radiances of a most subtle insight came at intervals; tones of noble pious sympathy, recognisable as pious, though strangely coloured, were never wanting long."

This is not a reverential description, but no doubt, taking into consideration the keen doubting unawed vision of the gazer, coming from latitudes so different, a true one, and amazingly vivid and real. There are still traces even in this picture of the same man who entranced the audience in the stage-coach, and made known his identity wherever he went by holding all bystanders suspended, as was the image in those days, on his breath.

He died in 1834 still under the charge of the pair to whose very name a grateful sentiment clings. After all, it is but little Coleridge has left behind him of real importance, less than any one of his contemporaries: and yet for fine poetical fame, the highest ethereal crown which mankind can bestow, there is no one in English literature who has gained a more delicate laurel, or one more unanimously accorded. Far more subtle and spontaneous in the intuitions of spiritual life than Wordsworth, with a sense of mystic meaning infinitely more penetrating and universal than Shelley, there are no others to be compared to him in his generation. The three poems upon which his reputation rests are among the most perfect of the great productions of the age.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, born 1770 ; died 1850.

Published Descriptive Sketches, 1793.

Lyrical Ballads, 1 vol., 1798.

Lyrical Ballads, 2 vols., with many additions, 1800.

Poems in two volumes, 1807.

These included, among many others of his finest poems, the "Ode," and the "Leech-Gatherer" called "Resolution and Independence."

Tract on the "Convention of Cintra," 1809.

Contributions to the *Friend*, 1809-10.

(Advice to the Young ; Essays on Epitaphs.)

- Published *Guide to the Lake Country*, 1810.  
*The Excursion*, 1814.  
*The White Doe of Rylstone*, 1815.  
*Peter Bell* (written in 1799), 1819.  
*The Waggoner*, 1819.  
*Sonnets on the River Duddon*, 1819.  
*Memorials of a Tour on the Continent* (chiefly Sonnets), 1822.  
*Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, 1823.  
*Yarrow Revisited and other Poems*, 1835.  
*Poems chiefly of Early and Later Years* (including *Memorials of Tour in Italy*), 1842.  
*The Prelude* (after the Poet's death), 1850.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, born 1772 ; died 1834.

- Published *Moral and Political Lectures ; Conciones ad Populum*, etc., 1795.  
*The Watchman*, 1796.  
*Poems on Various Subjects*, 1796.  
     Second edition, with additions and various poems of Charles Lamb and Charles Lloyd, 1797 ; third edition, 1803.  
*Ode to the Departing Year*, 1796.  
*Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* (in *Lyrical Ballads*), 1798.  
*Various Poems*, including *Fire*, *Famine*, and *Slaughter*, in *Morning Post* ; reprinted in pamphlet form, 1800.  
*Translation of Wallenstein*, 1800.  
*Poems originally published in Morning Post*, reprinted in Southey's *Annual Anthology*, 1800.  
*The Friend*, 1809-10 ; another edition in 1818.  
*The Remorse*, 1813.  
*Christabel*, 1816.  
*A Lay Sermon*, 1816.  
*Another Lay Sermon*, 1817.  
*Biographia Literaria*, 1817.  
*Sibylline Leaves*, 1817.  
*Zapolya*, 1817.  
*Aids to Reflection*, 1825.  
*First collected edition of Poetical and Dramatic works*, 1828 ; another, 1829.  
*On the Constitution of Church and State*, 1830.

## CHAPTER VIII.

ROBERT SOUTHEY—WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR.

THERE are few stranger accidents in the history of literature than that which has linked the name of Southey to those of the two greater brethren whom we have just discussed. His early association with Coleridge ended so soon that the two poets could have had but little influence upon each other, and though their connection by marriage kept up relations of friendship between them, their minds were as different as day and night. With Wordsworth, Southey had no early connection, and though a sober friendship united them in maturer life, there was no conjoint work, or even literary sympathy, to justify the common appellation of the Lake Poets, by which they were known, in spite of many protests, all their lives, and still to some degree continue to be known. It was not, however, only in poetry that the new age had developed new powers. A new school of critics had sprung up side by side with the new poets, animated by such an impulse of opposition and resistance as gave new force to the name and new importance to the profession. It was their business to require from the men of genius, whom they did their best to quell and overwhelm and keep in bounds, full proof of their divine commission, and this ungracious but useful office they performed *con amore*, fighting every step of that way to Fame, of which they

were the volunteer and often officious guardians. It was in the exercise of this task, and among other skilful ways of depreciating and offending the objects of their care, that the above nickname (always so easy a weapon and so generally popular) was invented. Afterwards there was a "Satanic school," which was not equally effective, but yet had its day.

To compare the philosophical and dreamy Coleridge, with his rare and strange poetical inspirations, the austere and self-absorbed Wordsworth, with his obstinate poetic creed—and that able, precise, and laborious intelligence, always busy and never exhausted, which distinguished the best man of the three, the support and stay of all who trusted in him, the noble, generous, and blameless Southey, is an invidious task. It is not only that one star differeth from another star in glory, but that there is a difference of kind more visible now than when they stood together, putting a gulf between them which neither of them was aware of, and which the critics themselves, for all their acuteness of vision, missed. In life, neither of these, his great contemporaries, was Southey's equal; but in poetry there can be little doubt that this most admirable and excellent of men occupied a very different and a very much lower standing ground. We make the admission with a certain grudge and sense of injustice in the arrangements of Providence. Why should not the most excellent have had the highest gifts? but there is no answer to this question. Southey bore the burdens of all connected with him. He was the friend of all who were in need; his purse and his heart were alike open to all suppliants, and his helping hand never wanting to any one whom he could aid. He worked early and late, well and ill, with a cheerful devotion which no man has ever surpassed, and, though not wiser than other men, was better than other men, both in purity of soul

and noble use of his talents. But he did not get the prize from heaven. In his excellence he was left low down in the lower room, and no one said to him, "Come up higher." The others were not so learned nor so painstaking, any more than they were as good. One of them wasted his existence, and was unfaithful to all his duties. The other shut himself up within himself, within the closest domestic circle, and, doing his duty there, did no more. Strange favouritism of heaven! They did not deserve the supreme gift as he did who never got it. But Southey, let us be thankful, was quite unaware of the injustice. He was as sure as either of them of his own immortality,—much more sure, indeed, than Coleridge, whose faulty life and lost opportunities kept him humble. "One overwhelming propensity," the excellent Southey says, "has formed my destiny, and marred all prospects of rank or wealth; but it has made me happy, and *it will make me immortal*. . . . Every generation will afford me some half-dozen admirers, and the everlasting column of Dante's praise does not stand upon a wider basis." Blessed delusion! he went to his grave with it; but it is strange and humiliating to the interested bystander, who cannot but love Southey, to note the extraordinary misapprehension of his own powers and absence of literary discrimination, which could make it possible for him to compare his fame with the "everlasting praise" of Dante. It was well for his own comfort, however, that he could do so.

Southey parted company with Coleridge when he went to Lisbon in 1795. He was there for six months, and on his return plunged at once into the life of a hard-working writer. A similar kind of appointment to that which enabled Coleridge to keep up his cottage at Nether Stowey, an engagement upon a daily newspaper, with chance contributions to the *Monthly Magazine*, etc.

afforded to Southey a little certainty of income,—a certainty supplemented by the annuity of £160 a year secured to him by his friend Mr. Wynn on coming of age. Nearly the same sum was given to Coleridge by the Wedgewoods; indeed, all the three poets had a sustenance steady if small, thus provided for them by private friendship, a fine relic of the days when the fortunes of the poet became the special care of his patron. We doubt whether the same generosity would occur to any one now. Southey wandered for some time before deciding upon his home. He began to read law reluctantly, having no liking for anything but literature. Finally, in 1802, after another visit to Portugal, and much wandering, he settled in the Lake district, where Coleridge was then living. Though they had fallen so much apart, they still kept up an affectionate friendship, and Southey had repeatedly planned in his letters the possibility of a joint household somewhere in the south, where he then hoped to get diplomatic employment. "I shall have so little to do," he writes, speculating on this subject in something of the spirit of the old Pantisocracy, "that my time may be counted my own, and our joint amusements will easily supply all expenses." These joint amusements were the sonnets and occasional verses which made the *Morning Post* and *Courier* of the period memorable. But no diplomatic appointment turned up; and after a second visit to Portugal, and a gradual increase of literary engagements, all ideas of any profession but literature were relinquished. Coleridge had settled for the time in Greta Hall, on the banks of the Greta, near Keswick, and the description which he sent of his house to his brother-in-law was very tempting to a poet. It was a house "on a low hill," commanding beautiful views, the river Greta winding round the slope, and "catching the evening lights in front of the house." Before it lay "a

giant's camp, an encamped army of tent-like mountains." Southey had been wandering about Wales, verifying the scenery of his *Madoc*, when this description reached him. He had just failed in securing a house there, and Coleridge's company was a great temptation to him, as that of her sister was to his wife. They went accordingly, though with some doubts, to the north country, and there remained for the rest of their lives; there all their children were born, except the first, who died shortly after her birth: and all Southey's joys and sorrows and his endless labours, and his life of cheerful excellence, belong to this odd establishment, where there were three families under one roof, besides the quaint little bachelor apartments of the owner of the house, who occupied one portion of it with his housekeeper till his death.

Coleridge's wanderings have been already described. He was never at home for any lengthened period; and in 1810 finally disappeared from their society; but the three Bristol beauties, who had married the young enthusiasts on the eve of starting for the Pantisocracy on the banks of the Susquehannah, were all collected there,—Mrs. Lovell, a widow, with one child; Sara, once celebrated in tenderest verse, but soon left behind, with her beautiful girl and her infant boys, not much better than a widow, though her husband lived. The happy one was Edith Southey, whose tender and faithful mate never left her side when he could help it, and was the kind brother and helper of the others, the head of this strangely mingled household. Here brothers, friends, everybody who wanted a temporary home, came as to the headquarters of the clan. When the old landlord died, it was a matter of course that his old housekeeper, the beloved of the children, should stay, a member of the overflowing household, till the end. Why should any



one leave it? Kindness and love were in the house and radiated from it. Southey was always busy, but never too busy to have a cheerful greeting for all who came, and that tender courtesy of ready attention even to the irrelevant, which is the genius of the heart. There is no more beautiful sight than that of this good man in the midst of the group, the greater part of which, strictly speaking, did not belong to him—the children who had but a secondary claim at the best, and yet were all his, mingled and undistinguishable, in the love and cheerful warmth of the domestic centre, the lovely and serious Sara Coleridge growing up the very twin of his own gay Edith; and, among the rest, that strange and elvish boy, “whose fancies from afar were brought,”—the quaint little “Moses” of whom Southey’s letters when he is absent are full, the unfortunate and gentle Hartley, whose life was wrecked by some mysterious reflection of the sins of his fathers before he was born. The house, with that “encampment of mountains” before it, and the river at its feet catching the evening lights: the bookshelves gradually spreading over all the rooms: and the happy voices and soft family commotion surrounding that heart of gentle silence and tranquillity, the study—is delightful to think of. Sorrow came to it, bitter and hard to bear; but yet for years a happier home, a more ideal shelter and refuge and centre of all the charities, was not on earth.

Southey had taken no part in the “Lyrical Ballads,” nor does he seem, any more than the merest Philistine of the moment, to have understood or appreciated this publication, which its authors were so anxious to prove to be a new departure. He scarcely knew Wordsworth, indeed, at the time of its publication; and Coleridge’s devotion to the society of his new friend had probably kept him apart from his older connections, and given a

shade of prejudice to their minds. A certain impatience and almost intolerance of their crusade against the previous faith and poetical dogmas of England, appears by times, involuntarily, unconsciously, in Southey. He was so busy a man, and had his mind so teeming with schemes and plots for new work, that the obstinate return of Wordsworth to the charge, and his determination to conquer with the very same volume, little enlarged, which had provoked such a storm of disapproval, must naturally have exasperated the buoyant and fertile mind which had so much always ready to pour forth. Coleridge, he thought, had made "the clumsiest attempt at German mysticism I ever saw" in the "Ancient Mariner;" and he had scarcely patience with the men who, full of genius as he knew them to be, did so little, while he was overflowing with work. As for the revolution which was finally accomplished by that publication, Southey was unacquainted with it. He is like a man arranging his books or classifying his antiquities in a library or museum while governments are being overthrown and kingdoms upset outside. He knows nothing about these revolutions; he had not been aware of the want of them, and he did not see the effect when it was accomplished. In Wordsworth's theories at a later period he partially agreed, but he never seems to have perceived that, side by side with the busy wheels of his always working imagination, a power greater than his own was changing altogether the aspect of affairs.

Southey, however, might have taken credit, had he been aware of what was going on, for the fact that he alone of all his contemporaries had never bowed the knee to Baal. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge had begun to write in the recognised poetical style, in the couplets and mechanic tune of which Cowper had complained even while employing it. But Southey, so far, had been

original from the beginning; he had spurned that bondage. He was of an orthodox nature, notwithstanding his youthful vagaries; but at the same time he had less reverence than the more truly poetical spirits, and evidently felt no bond of allegiance to those who had gone before. His mind had the independence of extreme energy and activity, an independence which was at once a fault and a virtue—a fault because it gave him overconfidence in his own way, and made his own taste his only real standard. Thus he had no eye for what was wanting at the crisis, no consciousness of a change of current in the stream of literature. He had got into a wild eddy of his own, and was ready to stake his existence on its flow: but he did not even perceive the sweep of the larger river. He was, indeed—at a time, so to speak, of great legislative changes—only a rebel and nothing more. By the fact that he preferred freedom—nay, lawlessness—for himself, he gave a certain aid to the final strokes of the emancipators, but inadvertently and without any real sympathy in their work. He himself never could have belonged to any school, unless he had originated one. We could imagine him, indeed, at the head of a band of young *collaborateurs*, setting them literary tasks by the dozen, and never so pleased as when devising plots and constructing skeletons of endless dramas, epics, fables, and histories, plans which only the limit of individual faculty prevented him from carrying out himself; but it is impossible to conceive of him as working in harmony with other equal or superior minds, or in subordination to a greater purpose than his own.

The following extract from a letter to one of his faithful friends will show how his “barmy noddle” was continually at work:—

“I have some plots maturing in my head, but none ripe. My wish is to make something better than love the mainspring, and I

have one or two sketches ; but all my plots seem rather calculated to produce one or two great scenes than a general effect. My mind has been turned too much to the epic, which admits a longer action and passes over the uninteresting parts.

"The escape of the Pythoness with a young Thessalian seems to afford most spectacle. If you have 'Diodorus Siculus' at hand, and will refer to Lib. 16, p. 428, you may find all the story, for I know no more than the fact. Pedro the Just pleases me best ; this is my outline" (then follows a detailed description) . . . "This is a half-plot, you see, capable of powerful scenes, but defective in general interest, I fear. I have thought of a domestic story, founded on the persecution under Queen Mary. To this my objection is that I cannot well conclude it without burning my hero, or making the queen die very *à propos*, which is cutting the knot and not letting the catastrophe necessarily arise from previous circumstances. However, the story pleases me, because I have a fine Catholic woman and her confessor in it.

"For feudal times something might be made, perhaps, of a fief (feud ?) with a wicked lord, or of the wardship oppressions ; but what will young Colman's play be ? It may forestall me.

"Then I have thought of Sparta, of the Crypteia, and a Helot hero ; but this would be interpreted into sedition. Of Florida and the customary sacrifice of the first-born male ; in this case to have a European father and an escape. Sebastian comes into my thoughts, and Beatrice of Milan accused by Orsello on the rack and executed. A Welsh or English story would be better ; but fix where I will, I will be well acquainted with country, manners, etc. . . . You have these views as they float before me."

It is scarcely possible that a man with all these plans in his head should have had much sympathy with the method of the others, who meant to change the face of literature with "Alice Fell" and "Lucy Gray." He went along his nimble way while they were musing, always in earnest, always at full strain of production, elaborating notes when he was not writing poetry, and with his eyes ever open on old bookstalls and new publications for facts, which might verify the details of his old subjects, or suggest new. His workmanship was as conscientious as his invention was boundless. "Yesterday I finished 'Madoc,' thank God," he writes,

“and thoroughly to my satisfaction. But I have resolved on one great laborious and radical alteration. It was my design to identify ‘Madoc’ with ‘Mango Capoc,’ the legislator of Peru. In this I have totally failed; therefore ‘*Mango Capoc is to be the hero of another poem*, and instead of carrying ‘Madoc’ down the Marañon I shall follow the more probable opinion and land him in Florida. Here, instead of the Peruvians, who have no striking manners for my poem, we get among the wild North American Indians. On their customs and superstitions facts must be grounded and woven into the work, spliced so neatly as not to betray the junction. So much for ‘Madoc;’ it is a great work done, and my brain is now ready for the Dom Daniel, the next labour in succession.” Thus the wheels go round and one subject succeeds another.

Southey accomplished in the midst of all his other labours five long and important poems—three belonging to the vague world of mediæval life, where picturesque effects abound, and where fact is capable of transmutation—and two to the region of pure fable. Through all a serious and lofty purpose flows, though with a certain monotony. In all we are called to attend a heroic deliverer, or still more heroic penitent, through all that the powers of evil can do against him. In “Joan of Arc” the struggle is single. It is against the enemies of her country. But Madoc, the emigrant prince, has two phases, and after we have got him safely delivered from trouble in his own country, he has a savage conflict to go through in the new world before his power is established and his colony consolidated. The struggle of “Roderick the Goth” ends only in death. He is a despairing sinner when we see him first on the field of a lost battle; but soon the most sublime of penitents. In all the motive is the same; virtue almost superhuman, courage of the

most dauntless kind, love of the purest—even Roderick, though it is supposed to have been by the most dastardly of vices that he brought down Count Julian's vengeance and the Moors upon him, is washed white not only by his repentance, but by extenuating circumstances, which take all the darker shades out of his offence, and make it indeed no greater than that of Paolo and Francesca, the pair for whom all the world mourns. There is no divided purpose, no contending sympathies in these poems; they are straightforward moral romances, in which heroic virtue always gains the day. The wild eastern framework of "Thalaba" and "Kehama" gives a new aspect to the same old conclusion, but the purpose is still the same. Here, however, the poet goes wildly into waters unexplored and wastes unknown. They are the productions most characteristic of him, as being like nothing else in the range of English verse. In no way can we show so clearly the difference between Southey and his great contemporaries, as by comparing one of these poems with Coleridge's first memorable production: the purpose of which, professedly, was so to suspend the reader's judgment in respect to probabilities, that the supernatural should take hold of his mind with all the force of reality. To accomplish this he required no magic, no unearthly spells or terrors. "There was a ship, said he"—and forthwith the mists that veil the unseen trembled, and the great spiritual world outside of us—which every human soul is conscious of, or at the least suspects, became somehow apparent in glimpses, in touches, though without either contact or sight, a something wider and stranger than even the wide and terrible sea which opened like a picture before every reader. But Southey's method is not like this. His imagination has nothing to do with common existence, nor can he open those secret portals which go straight

into the darkness. What he does to awaken our wonder and our curiosity is to make a wild and strange picture of life, in which none of the circumstances are recognisable, and fill it with magical appliances not more strange or unknown than itself. If we are once persuaded to take any interest in the romantic existence of a Thalaba, we can have no difficulty in receiving along with him all the magicians that plot against him, for they are at least as real and in no way more unlike ordinary experience than he. Here is no question of that contact between the visible and invisible which at once excites and bewilders the faculties, and confuses our mind with a vain endeavour to discriminate, to keep hold upon the real, while the unreal grows before us in a truth that is more convincing than fact, yet is fiction. These are efforts altogether beyond the simple straightforward agencies of the lesser poet. The practical character of his mind, instead of weakening the romance in him, or subduing a very wilful and fantastic imagination, supports both as by an iron framework, working out these visionary creations into matter of fact details, and making the wildest machinery of invention "practicable." Thalaba and Kehama are both of the straightforward character of fairy tales—they are homogeneous, their most simple figures being as little like ordinary humanity as the incidents of their career are like the facts of life. Probability has nothing to do with them; they are wildly unreal, but always matter of fact. Coleridge, though he holds us breathless, takes no trouble to make us understand why so many and such terrible penalties were exacted from the Mariner, and the gentle moral into which he drops at the end of his mystic narrative falls upon us with the most confusing sense of incompleteness, without in the least breaking the extraordinary spell of that dream which is inexplicable—which we

have no wish to have explained. But about Southey there is no such difficulty. We understand it all perfectly. There is nothing left for our imagination, no uncertainty, nothing inadequate or without balance. We are prepared for all the magicians and the enchantments: none of these things ever surprise us. Spells are uttered freely which move earth and heaven; but they do not move us. We accompany the hero quite placidly to the foreseen adventure at the end of his career, and are not in the least astonished even by the Dom Daniel caves, though Southey, with his usual practical-romantic and elephantine-humorous style, thinks of setting on foot a calculation as to how much our earth would be affected by the destruction of those caverns supposed to lie at its centre. This was the kind of elaborate joke that pleased him. At his wildest his foot never abandons the earth. There is no flight in him, nor is there any world unfathomed into which even for a moment he can carry us in a trance of suspended living, in a lightning gleam of sudden discovery; nothing of that ethereal kind: but for sorceries and charms and straightforward magic, there is nobody like him. He could tell us the very shape of the shovel with which fuel is piled on to those central fires.

Kehama is still more matter of fact in its wildness than Thalaba. We are here in the presence of an almost almighty man, who, by his magic, is gradually getting possession not only of earth but heaven. But heaven and earth are indistinguishable, and our minds are wearied, not excited, by the monotonous wonders which accumulate so steadily and fit in so exactly into the elaborate tale. It is in this poem that one of those few pieces of verse occurs, which alone, of all Southey's voluminous works, have taken the ear of the world. Of the many volumes he has left behind him besides, only



one or two ballads have secured a place in the general memory, and, so far as we are aware, no child learns, no memory retains, any of the scenes of Madoc or Roderick, though some of these are picturesque enough to deserve a better fate. The address to Love in Kehama, he himself declared to be clap-trap, and resented the selection of it as an example of the poem; in which he was right enough, for it is no fair example of the poem, and it does partake of the nature of clap-trap, that sublimated mixture of commonplace and sentiment which always delights the multitude :—

“They sin who tell us Love can die.  
 With life all other passions fly,  
 All others are but vanity.  
 In Heaven Ambition cannot dwell,  
 Nor Avarice in the vaults of Hell;  
 Earthly these passions of the Earth,  
 They perish where they have their birth;  
 But Love is indestructible.  
 Its holy flame for ever burneth,  
 From Heaven it came, to Heaven returneth;  
 Too oft on Earth a troubled Guest,  
 At times deceived, at times oppress’d,  
 It here is tried and purified,  
 Then hath in Heaven its perfect rest:  
 It soweth here with toil and care,  
 But the harvest time of Love is there.

Oh! when a Mother meets on high  
 The Babe she lost in infancy,  
 Hath she not then, for pains and fears,  
 The day of woe, the watchful night,  
 For all her sorrow, all her tears,  
 An over-payment of delight?”

There are many Englishmen, not too ignorant, who know this and nothing more, of Robert Southey’s long and elaborate poem, which he constructed with such care, and for which he hoped not the vulgar fame of popularity, but an audience fit though few, extending downward

through the generations. The reader will feel a certain shame yet pleasure to know that in his own mind he had no doubt on this point. He believed that his fame would go on increasing and rest upon as wide a basis as Dante's. He chid his friend for calling him the most sublime poet of the age, not that he had any difficulty in accepting the title, but because "both Wordsworth and Landor are at least my equals." Poor Southey! One smiles yet weeps over the delusion.

And it is difficult to believe that Southey aided in any perceptible way in the poetical revolution of the time. His freedom of poetic diction was as entirely unlike that for which Wordsworth contended, as his Oriental magic was like the mystic and visionary insight of Coleridge. The *Edinburgh Review*, in its first number, begins a critical notice of *Thalaba* by a disquisition upon the style of the *sect*, of which the author of *Thalaba* was, it believed, "one of the chief apostles and champions," which, while evidently aimed at Wordsworth's pleased theory, was ludicrously inappropriate to the best they had never professed any belief in homeliness and sion, and never abandoned the elevated subordination adopted in poetry. But the critic "in no other poet of real identification of the kind of the conventionally Southey did indulge. *Thalaba* and fantastic, wherever from the simplicities of the, very curious. One of the live- at the same time a free, the tie which we must shortly travagant in license, and to Walter Savage Landor, a disappeared but a

'The first thing that strikes the reader of all the men Jeffrey (after he has ended his discourse upon the peculiar totally different style), "is the singular structure of the, at un- cation, which is a jumble of all the measures that are known in English poetry (and a few more), without rhyme, and without any sort of regularity in their arrangement. . . . Every combination of different measures is apt to perplex and disturb the reader who is not familiar with it, and we are never reconciled to a sentence of

a new structure till we have accustomed our ear to it by two or three repetitions. This is the case even where we have the assistance of rhyme to direct us in our search after regularity, and where the definite form and appearance of a stanza assures us that regularity is to be found. When both of these are wanting, it may be imagined that our condition will be still more deplorable, and a compassionate author might even excuse us if we were unable to distinguish this kind of verse from prose. . . . The author, however, entertains a different opinion of it. . . . He is persuaded that its melody is more obvious and perceptible than that of our vulgar measures. 'One advantage,' says Mr. Southey, 'this metre assuredly possesses,—the dullest reader cannot distort it into discord; he may read it with a *prose mouth*, but its flow and fall will still be perceptible.'

The writer proceeds with characteristic malice to quote various passages in which "the flow and fall" are very confusing and eccentric. Thus Southey demonstrates once more what we have called, for want of a better term, the imaginative matter-of-factness of his mind. It was not for him to see the beauty that lay in the simplest phrases of nature, which Wordsworth, though from mistakes and much lack of critical discrimination, as a certain arrogance of belief that he had and use them—had divined: but he then having a side twist, and adopted it in his It soweth freedom into lawlessness, yet of this But the hat more a rigid machinery of odd Oh! when a Mother measures, distinguished less The Babe she lost in all previous custom and Hath she not then, for paid The day of woe, the freedom, it seemed to go Itself adrift more completely from previous than the real and moderate emancipation which landed upon a genuine principle. It is possible that thus in its dash and bravado of irregularity, the poetry of Thalaba and Kehama assisted, especially with the vulgar, in detaching the last of the chains of Pope and precedent.

This mixture of daring independence and impatience of control, with a certain innate orthodoxy of mind, was very characteristic of Southey. In the method which struck his fancy he would have his fling regardless who opposed him, but he could not construct anything that was not built upon an actual foundation. His scenery and enchantments are not only, as we have said, always "practicable," to use theatrical language, but they are all punctiliously founded on fact, not a cantrip that does not hold its footing on some legend, not a spell that has not been got out of some tradition. Yet the language in which these wild yet perfectly matter-of-fact operations are narrated is beyond rule, and put together in defiance both of precedent and English custom. The measure was his own invention, and he held by it notwithstanding his certainty that it would not please the public, nor commend itself to the English ear. In "Kehama," indeed, he went even farther, mixing this novel measure with interjections of rhyme at his will, and content, if he pleased his own ear, to leave his readers to make the best they could of the unfamiliar medley. This lawlessness and caprice, existing along with the most dutiful subordination to fact and knowledge, are apparent in no other poet of the day. Southey's sympathy with the conventionally wild and weird, with the eccentric and fantastic, wherever he found them, is exceedingly curious. One of the liveliest friendships of his life, the tie which we must shortly discuss, which bound him to Walter Savage Landor, a man whose strange personality has disappeared but a short time since from among us, and who of all the men of his time was perhaps the most lawless, the most undisciplined, the wildest embodiment of human caprice known to recent times, is a case in point.

Southey's other long poems stand upon a different footing; their length itself is perhaps the most remark-

able thing about them. They have faded away notwithstanding some beauty of description and much tenderness of sentiment, more completely perhaps than they deserve. "Joan of Arc" is so long-winded in expression, and so inadequate in conception, that nobody can regret it, and it was a very youthful production and might well have been sacrificed had its successors profited by its fall. But this unfortunately is what they did not do. They were all composed with care and pains unspeakable. "So very laboriously was 'Madoc' re-written and corrected time after time, that I will pledge myself, if you ask me in any instance why one word stands in the place of another . . . to give you a reason which will convince you that I had previously weighed both in the balance." And Southey went to Wales on purpose to make himself sure of the scenery, and accumulated as much learning in his notes as would not have misbecome the most authentic and dignified history. We can but say alas! when all is done. How is it that the effect does not follow? Here there is everything but one thing, the altar laid, the sacrifice extended, the faggots ready as in that famous offering prepared by the priests of Baal: but the divine spark is wanting, and no touch from heaven sets it alight. Roderick is a little more vigorous, but the wild and guilty Goth is made into so exemplary a penitent, and even his crime is so smoothed down and pared away, that the fierce story is turned into a pathetic romance of the sentimental-religious kind, and though happiness is indeed postponed until the heavenly meeting to which all look forward, it is so certain that the most exacting stickler for a good end must be satisfied. The story of Roderick was in favour at this particular moment. It was taken as the subject of a drama by Savage Landor, and Scott also made use of one incident in the tale. Landor's "Count Julian" has been greatly applauded

though little read, but we think we need not hesitate to give the palm, such as it is, to Southey. Scott's poem is little more than a rhetorical account of the revolutions which were to run over Spain, with special reference to the heroes of the Peninsular war, and Roderick has very little to do with it. But of the two friends who treated this tragical episode of history, neither has succeeded in impressing it upon the mind of the reader. Southey's poem is one to be read in the leisure of youth, when the soul has an unbounded capacity for verse, if indeed now in these days of examinations youth has any more leisure than the rest of us for reading which "does not pay;" but it will never out of that gentle obscurity lay hands upon any one, or compel the alteration of the world's verdict. The half-dozen *ames d'élite*, who were to be Southey's ever-increasing audience, and make him immortal, have disappointed his expectations, and all those labours and hopes, and that ardour of poetic energy, are but so much waste. "Few persons will like 'Kehama,'" he says himself: "everybody will wonder at it; it will increase my reputation without increasing my popularity. A general remark will be, what a pity that I have wasted so much power." And then he consoles himself with the thought of the half-dozen admirers which "every generation" would afford him. We grudge their non-existence, and our own inability to be one of them, for Southey's sake; but, on earth at least, he never knew: and if he became aware of it afterwards, probably he had learned by that time the secret of greater poetry. We must hope that *amour propre*, and vanity, whatever may be said for more lofty sentiments, do not outlive the grave.

In the very end of the century, when Southey, out of health and out of spirits, but busy, as always, was preparing for a second expedition to Lisbon, he fell upon a small and flimsy publication printed "by a small book-

seller at Warwick, in the form of a sixpenny pamphlet," which took him by storm. It was called "Gebir," and was the work of a young man who had shared something of his own fate at the University, an unruly youth who had left his college in disgrace, and was already an Ishmael of private life, with his hand against every man, and a strong conviction that every man's hand was against him. The poem was a very strange one, wildly unintelligible and confused, so far as its story goes, but with gleams of strange beauty in it like "flashes of lightning at midnight," as Southey afterwards said. It charmed his congenial mind at once. With eager generosity he hailed the advent of the new poet, in the *Critical Review*, to which he was then a contributor, and spread its reputation privately among all his friends. "You will find in it some of the most exquisite poetry in the language," he says to one; to another, that "it has miraculous beauties. I would go a hundred miles to see the anonymous author." When he went off upon his journey he took "Gebir" among his few books. A sort of love at first sight moved him towards the brother-soul who had produced it. When he heard the name of the author, he cudgelled his brains to remember him at Oxford, where all he could recollect was that he had the character of being a "mad Jacobin." Southey was not clear that there was not even now something not quite sound in the brain of the new writer. The poem was like "the miraculous work of a madman," he said to William Taylor, probably feeling less safe in his enthusiasm with that excellent bourgeois-critic. For nobody else whom he encountered in his maturer life does he express the same interest. When he met at last, several years later, with this friend of his imagination, he speaks of the encounter with almost rapturous satisfaction.

"At Bristol I met the man, of all others, whom I was most desirous of meeting—Savage Landor, the author of 'Gebir.' I never saw any one more unlike myself in every prominent part of human character, nor any one who so cordially and instinctively agreed with me on so many of the most important subjects. I have often said before we met that I would walk forty miles to see him, and having seen him, I would gladly walk fourscore to see him again. He talked of 'Thalaba,' and I told him of the series of mythological poems which I had planned, mentioned some of the leading incidents on which they were to have been formed, and also told him for what reason they were laid aside—in plain English, that I could not afford to write them. Landor's reply was, 'Go on with them, and I will pay for printing them, as many as you will write, and as many copies as you please.' 'I had reconciled myself' (says Southey, in a burst of mingled pride and humility, and grateful enthusiasm) 'to my abdication, if the phrase may be allowed, and am not sure that this princely offer has not done me mischief: for it has awakened in me old dreams and hopes which have been laid aside, and a stinging desire to go on, for the sake of showing him poem after poem, and saying— I need not accept your offer, but I have done this because you made it. It is something to be praised by one's peers.'"

This proposal of generous extravagance is the best manner of introduction which we could find for Landor. It was entirely characteristic of the man. Born to a good estate, and with the habits of wealth, he was ready to lavish assistance—at least in intention—upon all with whom he sympathised; and if it seldom came about that his intentions could be realised, that was less his fault than the fault of circumstances, of unkind fortune which deprived him of the means, but never of the will to aid. Landor's biographer, Mr. John Forster, suggests, with great ingenuity, that Southey admired in Landor the terseness and concentration of thought which were so wanting in himself, the rich conglomerate of fancy too closely pressed and heaped together to give fair play to all its beauties, which formed such a contrast to his own natural diffuseness and long-drawn fluency. But the friendship was far more than a merely poetical one, and there can be little



doubt, we think, that that latent love of the strange and extravagant, which had so little outlet in his own dutiful and self-controlled life, attracted Southey to the most bizarre of all the many eccentrics who have borne the name of men of letters. There were various more reasonable points of meeting between them; they were both fond of learning, of out-of-the-way studies, of books in the fullest sense of the word—both running over with impetuous activity and independence, both generous and hasty. But the one who had tamed himself into steady work, and weighted himself with unusual burdens, and set aside the fantastic occupation he loved for the less delightful trade by which he lived—felt his imagination emancipated from all these bondages when he saw a man bound by none of them, who had flung off all restraints and behaved as he liked, in a subject and wondering world. From the beginning to the end of his career, Southey seems never to have indulged in a laugh at his friend's wild explosions, or at the ups and downs of a mind so precariously balanced that every breath affected its equilibrium. He was always respectful, even of Landor's wildest vagaries, and treated his fits of overwhelming despair and of passionate offence with equal seriousness, refusing to look at the ridiculous side. Southey was equally loyal to his early friendship for Coleridge, and had the most undoubting faith in his genius, and admiration for it; but Coleridge's weaknesses were not of a kind with which he had any sympathy; and with none of the "peers," whose applause was so sweet to him, did the author of "*Thalaba*" stand on such an invariably tender and brotherly footing as with this wild and uncontrolled rebel against all the respectabilities. It does not seem too bold an assumption to say that here once more the extravagant-practical, the imaginative matter-of-fact, which was a characteristic of Southey's mind, affected his

liking. Landor was an embodiment such as he loved of the poetic nature. He was romance made into fact, a sort of naked and unveiled genius, with all the movements of his inspired soul visible to the eye, and no coverings of reason or common sense, or any other of the draperies with which ordinary persons conceal themselves from the world, to make him like other men.

This extraordinary being was the son of a race of country gentlemen possessing ease and breeding, and a comfortable standing ground upon the soil. His own father had adopted the profession of a doctor, in those days when every local district had its own little metropolis, and Warwick was to Warwickshire what London is now to every county in England. Dr. Landor occupied the largest house in the little town, and was more than a professional man—a person of local importance, heir to a good estate, the husband in succession of two heiresses, and altogether a dignified figure in the little world, more individual, more independent, than any provincial society now-a-days, to which he belonged. He had a number of children, the eldest of whom was the future poet—a boy very soon to make himself remarkable, and the greatest plague that a sober-minded household could have had. He was heir of entail both to his father's and mother's property; and no doubt, in his restless vivacity, wild temper, and budding genius, a very important member of the doctor's household. Fabulous stories are told of his feats of strength and athletic skill, and reckless vagaries at school; but these seem to merit little attention. Insubordinate, undisciplined, yielding to every fancy that crossed his mind, and plunging into every unreasonable freak that tempted him, he evidently was, and continued to be all his life. His manners were as eccentric as his mind. He was greatly given to "riotous laughter," "a long loud laugh hardly less than leonine," sounding

“higher and higher, peal after peal, in continuous and increasing volleys until regions of sound were reached very far beyond ordinary human lungs;” but the jokes that produced this hurricane of mirth do not seem to have been remarkable for brilliancy. He was distinguished at school, where “Playday for Landor’s Latin verses” was a pleasure which his old school-fellows long remembered—but was too fastidious and proud ever to compete for any distinction. At Oxford he spent only a year and a half, retiring compulsorily from his college (Trinity) in consequence of a foolish freak. Nothing can be more strange than to note (once more) how entirely independent of those influences of the Universities which are considered of sovereign importance to English youth was the generation of poets to which Landor belonged. They were none of them devoid of a love of learning, yet of the four mentioned up to this time—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, and Landor—only one took his degree, and he the least learned, the least academical, of all. One wonders if the next generation of poets will be more inclined towards those regions in which they “wear the gown.”

Landor was “a mad Jacobin,” according to Southey’s recollection, in his college days. He was wildly excited, like all the rest, by the French Revolution and American independence, and the fever of freedom that was in the air. “I was about the first student who wore his hair without powder,” he says. “‘Take care,’ said my tutor; ‘they will stone you for a republican.’” Southey, too, took this wildly revolutionary step. They were at Oxford at the same time—next door to each other, so to speak, in Balliol and Trinity, the two powderless long-haired youths. Young men of genius, real or supposed, seem to have a curious propensity towards long hair. These haunts of learning are not destitute of them now; but

they talk art at this moment more than poetry, and know little of the fervid energy of politics, the more manly inspiration which then fired every youthful soul, and promised Utopias, if not Paradises, of freedom and emancipation to come. Landor was as little disposed to produce his acquirements in public, or to acquire prizes by them, at Oxford as at Rugby. When he composed some more than usually exquisite piece of Latin verse, he read it to his chosen friends, and concealed it from the authorities. His first poem, "Gebir," already alluded to, which belongs to the period after he left college, while he was still only twenty, was composed partly in Latin, with a curious indifference to, or ignorance of, any larger world than that to which Latin would be as acceptable as English. This strange recklessness and contempt of general appreciation was conjoined in after times with much violent and bitter resentment of the indifference of the public, though he had himself so very broadly evidenced his contempt of its opinion. But Landor attained what Southey has failed to attain, if not the appreciation of the general reader, at least a considerable degree of enthusiasm and worship from that higher class which has the honours of literary reputation in its hands—if not, perhaps, the simpler universal crown of fame.

"Gebir" was written in the course of some wild wanderings in Wales, whither he strayed after his college disgrace, when his father's displeasure, and his own excited and restless spirit, made home little attractive to him. It was founded upon an Eastern tale, which he picked up accidentally out of a chance volume; but, indeed, it is to be hoped that this nameless book gave the incidents more clearly than the young poet interpreted them. Even Southey, the one admirer who stood its champion, did not make any boast of understanding it. He was content to admire the "exquisite

poetry" in it, the gleams of miraculous beauty. His description of it as "a picture in whose obscure colouring no plan was discoverable, but in whose every distinct touch the master hand was visible," is sufficiently true. The common reader is harder to please in this respect than the expert; he wants to know what he is reading about, what is the story, and who are the personages of the tale, if it is a tale. This is only to be gleaned by intense application, by the "flashes of lightning at midnight" to which Southey compared the intelligible passages. By these the reader makes out two male personages—a mysterious Prince Gebir, who has invaded Egypt, and an equally mysterious shepherd, his brother, who is keeping the prince's flocks hard by. How it was that the flocks accompanied the army in so peaceful and pastoral a manner is as little explained to us as how it was that the brother of the prince was the shepherd. So it is, and that is enough in those realms of fancy and impetuous youth, above all interpretations. The female personages are Charoba, Queen of Egypt, a visionary ancestress, we should suppose, of Cleopatra, and a sea-nymph, who woos Tamor, the shepherd, by a wrestling match, and at last carries him off to her home of bliss in the sea; while Gebir, less fortunate, is killed in the midst of his bridal feast by a poisoned mantle which Charoba's nurse has sought in a magical city of antiquity for the destruction of the invader—the idea being that peaceful love attains what war and violence forfeit. All this, however, is beyond the grasp of the ordinary reader, who has no clue to guide him through the waste; but "the flashes of lightning" are fine, and if not "the most exquisite poetry in the language," are still very well worth looking at. There is very little difference of opinion as to which passages embody the flashes thus described. The same quotation reappears wherever this

strange poem is referred to. There is one in particular in regard to which Landor was very fond of congratulating himself in after days, that Wordsworth had put it in his pocket and made use of the pretty notion. It is very pretty, like a delicate bit of workmanship in alabaster, or some such fairy material, but we doubt whether it has become one of "the priceless possessions of English poetry," as Mr. Forster says:—

"And I have sinuous shells of pearly hue  
Within, and they that lustre have imbibed  
In the sun's palace porch, where when unyoked  
His chariot-wheel stands midway in the wave.  
Shake one, and it awakens, then apply  
Its polished lips to your attentive ear,  
And it remembers its august abodes  
And murmurs as the ocean murmurs there."

This is charmingly pretty, much as the shell itself is, a curiosity to be put in the daintiest collection—but we think not much more. Anything which it is so easy to detach from its setting, and hand about for the admiration of the assistants, is always of doubtful excellence in poetry. A much finer effect, and one indeed which touches upon the sublime of human feeling, is that in which the disappointment of Charoba with one of the greatest sights in nature—great yet so much less than infinite imagination expected—is expressed:

"Past are three summers since she first beheld  
The ocean ; all around the child await  
Some exclamation of amazement : here  
She coldly said, her long-lash'd eyes abased,  
*Is this the mighty ocean ? is this all !*"

The sickness of the wondrous soul which was

"Capacious then as earth or heaven could hold  
Soul discontented with capacity—"

never able to see, or hear, or fathom half enough to

satisfy its larger requirements, is a perception far beyond any graceful metaphor or delicate description. It is more like the mystic insight of Coleridge, to whom all those depths were native, than anything in Southey's more precise and limited nature. So far as we are able to judge, this note struck by chance at twenty is one of the highest notes Landor ever struck. He produced a full-grown drama afterwards, a good deal of verse, and much poetical prose—but he scarcely ever attained this height of delicate insight again.

“Hardly a hundred copies were sold” of the book, and De Quincey boasted that he and Southey were the only two people who had read it, an assertion which, much as Landor loved Southey, irritated him and his friends. It was afterwards republished “in a much better edition, with a Latin translation;” Latin or English, the vehicle was indifferent to the boy poet, who perhaps was most confident on the whole of his powers in the older language, and indifferent to the limitation which this would have made in his audience—nay, rather pleased with the limitation. He would have scorned the vulgarity of a fame which was in everybody's mouth.

The career of Landor was full of storm and tumult, and it must be added of the strangest sincere braggadocio, vanity, generosity, and extravagance throughout. When his father died, he sold all that could be sold of his inheritance to buy a romantic property in Wales, Llanthony Abbey, where he believed himself to have planted a million of trees, and began to build an impracticable never-to-be finished house. Here he quarrelled with all his surroundings, and did everything that in him lay to make the neighbourhood too hot to hold him, while at the same time his hasty and unpractical nature was imposed upon on all sides. He soon found the Welsh

peasants about him to be savages, and the country gentlemen to be without a spark of public feeling. Every class of society joined in league to persecute and disturb him; his farmers did not pay their rent (though no theory of justification for that omission existed in those days), and Landor, after throwing away the greater part of his fortune, went off in profound offence and bitterness to Italy, where he lived for most of the remainder of his life. His stormy progress through the world was without any of the dignity which sometimes attends a passionate rebel against the ways of the world. He was too noisy, too eccentric, for any pomp of injured feeling or intellectual suffering. He stormed through his life, with violent puffs of smoke and fire, more like a runaway steam-engine fuming, creaking, snorting, exploding, tearing along the resounding way, than any grander fugitive. He married, rather, apparently, because he had been lucky enough to find a perfectly unsuitable person, than for any other motive. In after years, long after Llanthony had ceased to be anything but a burden and a trouble to him, he stumbled into a lovely spot upon his own natural inheritance, and asked passionately why he had not been persuaded to buy that instead of Llanthony, altogether unaware that he had himself sold it in order to purchase the imaginary paradise of the other. It would be difficult to find a better example of the hot-headed haste and confusion of the mind, which never saw anything but what it happened to be gazing at for the moment, and saw that through a wild illumination of impetuous fancy.

His only other important poetical work was the drama of "Count Julian," written shortly after. This is praised in terms so lofty by various excellent critics, that the simple reader, if the drama ever gained any such, would find it difficult to account for his disappointment in pre-



sence of their enthusiasm. "Landor's style is here at its best, and contemporary poetry has nothing to show beyond 'Count Julian' in purity or in grandeur," says Mr. Forster. "Mr. Landor," says de Quincey, "who always rises with his subject, . . . is probably the one man in Europe that has adequately conceived the situation, the stern self-dependency, and the monumental misery of Count Julian. That sublimity of penitential grief which cannot accept consolation from man, cannot bear external reproach, cannot condescend to notice insult, cannot so much as see the curiosity of bystanders; *that awful carelessness of all but the troubled deeps within his own heart and of God's spirit, brooding upon their surface, and searching their abysses, never was so majestically described.*" This is very high praise, but we find it difficult to assent to it. The position of Count Julian is one which might indeed be "majestically described," and is worthy of the hand which showed us Hamlet and Othello, each in the centre of a world which had crumbled about him, undermined by that falsehood which is the death of every possibility. A powerful Spanish noble, next to the king in dignity and influence, who in an hour of agonised fury, finding his daughter outraged by the monarch, calls in the aid of the Moors to revenge his quarrel and overthrow his enemy—but this done, sees for the first time that his frenzy of personal vengeance has lost his country, and that in driving Roderick from the field, he has put the yoke of the unbeliever upon the neck of Spain—is such a hero as demands the hand of the highest genius. After the last terrible battle, in which not only Roderick but his country is destroyed, the fugitive king puts himself into the power of his enemy. But Julian is too noble, too merciful, and at the same time too magnanimous, too contemptuous, to take the life of the wretched and vanquished fugitive.

The Moors, when they know that the king has escaped by his permission, fall upon him as a traitor, and Muza, their chief, condemns him to death. We quote a part of this scene, for the book is in few hands, and the reader otherwise might find it difficult to form an opinion of his own on the subject—

“MUZA.

Away with him!

JULIAN.

Slaves! not before I lift  
My voice to heaven and man: though enemies  
Surround me, and none else, yet other men  
And other times shall hear: the agony  
Of an oppress'd and of a bursting heart  
No violence can silence; at its voice  
The trumpet is o'erpower'd, and glory mute,  
And peace and war hide all their charms alike.  
Surely the guests and ministers of heaven  
Scatter it forth through all the elements,  
So suddenly, so widely, it extends,  
So fearfully men breathe it, shuddering  
To ask or fancy how it first arose.

MUZA.

Yes, they shall shudder: but will that, henceforth,  
Molest my privacy, or shake my power?

JULIAN.

Guilt hath pavilions, but no privacy.  
The very engine of his hatred checks  
The torturer in his transport of revenge,  
Which, while it swells his bosom, shakes his power,  
And raises friends to his worst enemy.

MUZA.

Where now are thine? will they not curse the day  
That gave thee birth, and hiss thy funeral!  
Thou hast left none that could have pitied thee.

## JULIAN.

Many, nor those alone of tenderer mould,  
 For me will weep ; many, alas, through me !  
 Already I behold my funeral ;  
 The turbid cities wave and swell with it,  
 And wrongs are lost in that day's pageantry :  
 Opprest and desolate, the countryman  
 Receives it like a gift ; he hastens home,  
 Shows where the hoof of Moorish horse laid waste  
 His narrow croft and winter garden-plot,  
 Sweetens with fallen pride his children's loss,  
 And points their hatred, but applauds their tears.  
 Justice, who came not up to us through life,  
 Loves to survey our likeness on our tombs,  
 When rivalry, malevolence, and wrath,  
 And every passion that once storm'd around,  
 Is calm alike without them as within.  
 Our very chains make the whole world our own,  
 Bind those to us who else had past us by,  
 Those at whose call brought down to us, the light  
 Of future ages lives upon our name.

## MUZA.

I may accelerate that meteor's fall,  
 And quench that idle ineffectual light  
 Without the knowledge of thy distant world.

## JULIAN.

My world and thine are not that distant one.  
 Is age less wise, less merciful, than grief,  
 To keep this secret from thee, poor old man ?  
 Thou canst not lessen, canst not aggravate  
 My sufferings, canst not shorten or extend  
 Half a sword's length between my God and me.  
 I thank thee for that better thought than fame,  
 Which none however, who deserve, despise,  
 Nor lose from view till all things else are lost.

Yet we, alive or dead, have fellow-men  
 If ever we have served them, who collect

From prisons and from dungeons our remains,  
And bear them in their bosoms to their sons.  
Man's only relics are his benefits ;  
These, be there ages, be there worlds, between,  
Retain him in communion with his kind :  
Hence is our solace, our security,  
Our sustenance, till heavenly truth descends,  
Covering with brightness and beatitude  
The frail foundations of these humbler hopes,  
And, like an angel guiding us, at once  
Leaves the loose chain and iron gate behind."

This idea is fine, but we think dwelt on at much too great length. The emancipation of the wronged and injured the moment they have received the fatal blow—the remorseful compensation which the world offers them, when there is nothing else left to give—is too consolatory and gentle a thought to have been the last thought of a man, conscious not only of great wrongs and sorrows, but of having been the instrument, by his own vengeance, of his country's calamity. Neither at such a tremendous moment is so long a strain of level verse enough for the necessities of the crisis. Even allowing that passion is swallowed up in the calm of supreme misery, yet no misery can be supreme which retains this consolation. It is the language of noble resignation and virtue, not the confused and bewildering death-song of a man, who heedlessly, without thought, has brought down, in avenging his own wrongs, a torrent of ruin upon the innocent, and finds it out to give bitterness to his end before he dies.

Landor, however, as well as his critics, was satisfied with "Count Julian," and the negotiations about its publication are amusing and characteristic. He described its writing to Southey with a little of his favourite and habitual brag. "I believe I am the first man who ever wrote the better part of a tragedy in a concert-room. . . . It cannot be well done, written with such amazing

rapidity; in forty hours I have *done* a thousand lines." Soon, however, he modifies this statement. "My rapidity in the composition was not so great as I led you to imagine. My hours were four or five together after long walks, in which I brought before me the various characters, the very tones of their voices, their forms, complexions, and step. In the daytime I laboured, and at night unburdened my mind, shedding many tears." But what was to be done with it was now the question. It ought to be printed—or perhaps rather produced on the stage. It was supposed that the character of "Count Julian" would suit Kemble—and at last Southey suggested that he should take it to London and offer it. Then Landor's pride took fire. "'Count Julian' shall never lie at Kemble's feet. It must not be offered for representation. I will print it, and immediately." It was then sent to Longman, with the following tragical result.

"I sent 'Count Julian' to your bookseller, Mr. Longman, and gave him to understand, though not in so many words, as people say, that you thought not unfavourably of it. I would have been glad to have given it up to him for half-a-dozen copies. . . . This would not do. I then proposed to print it at my own expense. This also failed. They would have nothing to do with it. We have lately had cold weather here, and fires. On receiving the last letter of Mr. Longman to this purport, I committed to the flames my tragedy of 'Ferranti and Giulio,' with which I intended to surprise you, and am resolved that never verse of mine hereafter shall be committed to anything else. My literary career has been a very curious one. You cannot imagine how I feel relieved at laying down its burden and abandoning this tissue of humiliations."

This is Landor all over. Because one tragedy is not to be printed, to rush to the fire with another is carrying despite to the farthest limit of hotheaded folly. Perhaps, however, after all, it was but the plan of "Ferranti and Giulio" which went into the fire, which would be the less damage.

In 1816 Landor went to Italy, from whence he sent forth the *Imaginary Conversations*, by which he will be chiefly known to posterity. These works have been greatly applauded by the best judges; but they have not penetrated the public mind. Perhaps, however worthy they had been, the effect on the general mass could never have been great; for how were the ignorant, who scarcely knew more than the names of the great personages introduced, to understand the fine points of character which were supposed to be unfolded in their imaginary talk? And works which are by their nature beyond the comprehension of the general reader must be content with a limited appreciation. Scholarship, like everything else that is human, has its disadvantages. It is narrowing, like ignorance. It keeps the mind within a certain circle; teaches it to prefer conventional themes; and to rank perfection of expression higher than truth to nature, Landor's system and inspiration were opposed in every principle to those which Wordsworth had spent his life in expounding, and consequently to the new fountain of literary life which belonged to the age; but they have always found the audience he would himself have most desired, and will probably continue to do so. They range over a wide extent of history from the great Greeks and Romans, mediæval nobles, Italian poets, reformers, statesmen, courtiers, and great ladies of the picturesque ages, down to contemporaries of his own; and embrace almost as large a range of topics. For our own part, we find character deficient in these generally very able, and sometimes brilliant little scenes. In many of them, naturally enough, the man who is not of Landor's way of thinking has a very poor part in the discussion, being put up as a sort of foil to the eloquence of the other, who entertains the same faith as his creator; and in this way it is curious to see Melancthon, for example, that mild man of com-

promises, crushing Calvin in argument, with an ease which makes the victory scarcely worth having. In some cases the familiarity of the dialogue between historical personages takes the reader aback, and in almost all we are forced against our will to see the ideas and tendencies of the nineteenth century painfully masquerading in robes of other days. But at the same time these curious historical studies have been approved and applauded by many of the most perfectly qualified critics; and Landor himself has been undoubtably received to all the honours of the poetic craft by all the poets who were his contemporaries. He lived to be the *doyen* of his art, the old man eloquent, at whose feet every ardent youth was proud to sit. Not Southey alone, but all the fraternity, applauded his productions and sought his friendship. When his first volume of *Imaginary Conversations* appeared, Wordsworth added a postscript of thanks and approbation to Southey's letter. He had "the praise of his peers" in no limited degree: but he never penetrated to the general heart, consequently he will never be capable of the highest fame.

To give a catalogue of the miscellaneous works of Southey would be almost impossible. He produced perhaps a larger body of literature than any other man living, making his income by reviews and critical articles, by histories and biographies, few of which merit higher praise than that of being excellent and conscientious work done without prejudice or partiality. One of these at least, his *Life of Nelson*, has become a classic. His own purpose in its composition is explained in his preface. He found that a life of the great seaman was wanted, "clear and concise enough to become a manual for the young sailor, which he may carry about with him till he has treasured up the example in his memory and heart." The book admirably carries out this intention. Its clear, direct,

and brilliant narrative has something in it of the power of the minstrel as well as the skill of the historian ; and the complicated story of the age never confuses the simple, lambent vigour, the heroic unity of the principal figure. There is no superfluity in it, but a picturesque fulness of detail. The same can scarcely be said for the lives of Wesley and Cowper, though both are important and valuable works. They are perhaps too long drawn out, especially that of the unhappy poet, in which there is so little incident : yet both remain standard books, and no subsequent performance has superseded them. Southey planned other and greater historical works, and contemplated with some melancholy, yet not without a certain pleasure, the idea of being chiefly remembered by those productions ; but he did not live to carry his larger conceptions out. The elaborate and elephantine humour of the *Doctor* gave himself a great deal of pleasure ; but the world has no longer leisure for pleasantries, even when mingled with wisdom, so lengthened and so laborious.

He put nothing out of his hand—curiously enough except his poems, which were what he loved the best and devoted himself most enthusiastically to—which was not creditable and good. The minor poems, however, are many of them very little worthy of his reputation, and some, even of those which he himself thought well of, and which his friends praised, are of no advantage to it. William Taylor of Norwich, a name which intrudes itself continually into the literature of that time, refers in letter after letter to a certain “Old Woman of Berkeley,” which Southey modestly allows to be a success ; but we doubt whether any jury even of the gentlest readers would vote for its preservation. His weekly engagement to produce a set of verses for the *Morning Post* is no doubt the cause of the existence of many of these minor poems. They did very good service by



furnishing a little income to the young and frugal pair at the commencement of their life; but it seems a pity to preserve, in a permanent form, so much verse that has so little merit in it.

Towards the end of Southey's life there happened to him what we can call nothing less than a great literary misfortune. He had been made Poet Laureate some time before, owing much to the good offices of Scott, to whom the appointment had been offered, and who resigned it, if we may so speak, in his favour. Southey tried to make a condition beforehand that the usual Odes and birthday salutations should not be required of him, but somehow this arrangement fell through, and he was called upon after all to supply, like his predecessors, the tedious tale of verse. When old King George died, it would seem that he thought some special effort was required of him. In the course of the years he had changed his politics entirely, and the young republican and revolutionary had turned into a thorough and sound Conservative and supporter of Church and King. Nobody will believe now that Southey had any interested motive in making this change. The wonder is rather that he could ever have been anything but that which he ended by being. It was the natural atmosphere of his mind, the natural condition of his perfectly regulated and sober life. But in those days of excited politics any change of the kind was branded as an apostasy, and there were many who accused Southey of being a turncoat, a "rat," a deserter from the cause of the people by reason of his pension and the favour of the great. Some time before, his early production, the dramatic sketch called "Wat Tyler," which he had never published, and had considered entirely abolished and done away with, was brought out suddenly by some scoundrel into whose hands it had fallen, with the intention of covering him with confusion, and also shaming the

Government which was supposed to have bought him. Southey accepted the consequences with courage, and added the boyish effort to the collection of his works with a manly acknowledgment that life had taught him various lessons between the ages of eighteen and forty, "and that it may not be supposed I think it any reproach to have written it, or that I am more ashamed of having been a republican than of having been a boy." But it cannot be supposed that this passage of arms had been pleasant to him, or the discussions of which it was the cause. How his good sense and judgment could have so far and entirely forsaken him, however, as to lead him to throw himself into the hands of his adversaries without shield or protection, as he did when he produced the poem with which he intended to do honour to poor old George III., it is impossible to understand. To make the matter a little more fatal, he prefixed to the "Vision of Judgment" a preface, in which he attacked with the sternest vigour the "Satanic School" newly arisen in poetry, with reference too clear to be mistaken to Lord Byron. Thus he delivered himself over with an extraordinary blindness of self-assertion and solemn vanity into the very hands of his slayers. The retaliation of the poet whom he thus assailed was made only too easy. It will be more properly treated when we have reached the corresponding point in the story of Byron and the younger brethren of poetry. But the "Vision of Judgment" itself is one of Southey's misfortunes in every way. It was an attempt to gain a footing for the hexameter in English verse, and even in that was not successful; but when we have said that Southey avows his poem to have been suggested by the great work of Dante, and does not shrink or tremble before the inevitable comparison, we have given all the proof necessary of his extraordinary temerity and blindness. "The reader," he says, "will so surely think of

the admirable passage in Dante, which was in the writer's mind when these lines were composed, that I should not think it necessary to notice the imitation were it not that we live in an age of plagiarism. . . . I have never contracted an obligation of this kind either to contemporary or predecessor without acknowledging it." Thus Southey does not hesitate on the threshold of his profane political paradise to call forth the great image of one of the Sovran poets of the world, to put himself by Dante's side, and treat him with respectful brotherhood and no alarm as his "predecessor." The audacity takes away our breath.

In the unfortunate poem itself, from a pretty twilight picture of his mountains and the shining evening skies behind them, we are suddenly transported into a visionary world where the aged shadow of poor old George,—pathetic, helpless, wrong-headed, mad king,—rises to judgment, and all heaven and hell are roused to receive him. But hell can bring no accusers against him; neither is there a voice in heaven or earth to condemn him; and with a great retinue of former statesmen and courtiers advancing in state to meet him, he is led upward to the reserved seats appointed for kings in that polite and considerate heaven. The curious spectacle of the reverential spirit-courtier, evidently hat in hand, and with bowed head, giving to his king a highly satisfactory account of the future of England, would be amusing were we not too sorry to see Southey committing himself so terribly. No poem ever written is more entirely indefensible or threw all his stronghold more unguardedly open to the enemy. It was a terrible and inexplorable mistake, due to the absence of perception which had made him choose so many strange subjects, to the self-will which had always been in Southey's poetical work, and to a self-confidence which had grown with years.

We must conclude with something more agreeable

than this unfortunate production. One of the minor poems which increase the bulk of his works, without adding in any way to his fame, was a "Pilgrimage to Waterloo," which was the product of a holiday spent abroad. The following verses from the poem to this work, and which describe his return home, are among the most beautiful and touching he ever wrote :—

"O joyful hour, when to our longing home  
The long-expected wheels at length drew nigh !  
When the first sound went forth, 'They come, they come !'  
And hope's impatience quicken'd every eye !  
'Never had man whom Heaven would heap with bliss  
More glad return, more happy hour than this.'

"Aloft on yonder bench, with arms dispread,  
My boy stood, shouting there his father's name,  
Waving his hat around his happy head ;  
And there, a younger group, his sisters came :  
Smiling they stood with looks of pleased surprise,  
While tears of joy were seen in elder eyes.

"Soon each and all came crowding round to share  
The cordial greeting, the beloved sight ;  
What welcomings of hand and lip were there !  
And when those overflowings of delight  
Subsided to a sense of quiet bliss,  
Life hath no purer deeper happiness.

. . . . .

"But there stood one whose heart could entertain  
And comprehend the fulness of the joy ;  
The father, teacher, playmate, was again  
Come to his only and his studious boy :  
And he beheld again that mother's eye  
Which with such ceaseless care had watch'd his infancy.'

Poor Southey ! this boy, "waving his hat around his happy head" was the dearest object of his life. The poem was scarcely printed in which this fond description is given, when Herbert, the beloved, the only and studious boy, was taken away from him. He came to a blank

and terrible pause in his life, such darkness of anguish as only parents know; and though he lived long after, and had another son given him as if to replace the lost, Southey never "got over" this crushing blow, or was the same man again. Printed among his later poems is a curious broken page, mingled of verses from the Bible and fragmentary lines of his own.

No more great attempts, only a few autumnal flowers, like second primroses—

"That name  
In sacred silence buried, which was still,  
At noon and eve, the never-wearying theme  
Of dear discourse,"

———"playful thoughts  
Turned now to gall and evil."

"They who look for me in our Father's Kingdom  
Will look for *him* also: inseparably  
Shall we be so remembered."

Such are the detached and broken lines, like sobs that gave utterance to his sorrow. An "In Memoriam" full of tender art and pains could not have been written by a father over the grave of his only son. These broken notes touch the reader's heart, if he has ever suffered in a similar way, with that pang of keen and almost intolerable fellow-feeling which is the profoundest form of sympathy. And thus we leave Southey, with our hearts bleeding for him—he whose heart had been open to forsaken children, to the weak and the needy, all his life,—yet out of his arms his own was taken, inscrutable and terrible recompense of a good man's life.

It will be suitable to name here a young and hapless poet whose brief story can never be dissociated from Southey's name. Henry Kirke White, who died in the beginning of the century, October 1806, at the age of

twenty-one, a poor youth so far in advance of his age that he died of examinations and over-cramming, by the kind but injudicious hands of the college authorities of St. John's, Cambridge, where he had gained a sizarship. He was one of those saintly youths whose religious blameless lives will always be reverentially read by the simple public, and whose gentle, devotional verses charm and awe and touch, perhaps, a larger number of minds than are ever affected by the highest voices of poetry. An early volume of poetry, which he published at seventeen, received the honours of a kind of martyrdom from a bitter critic; and the consumptive and suffering young poet almost died of the cruel assault. Southey, always kind, was moved by this to an indignant championship of the dying youth, consoled him with tender praise, and afterwards published his little biography and innocent pious "Remains," which became dear to many a young and innocent reader.

Other young names of promise never carried out, which the always generous and tender hand of the gentle Laureate did its best to crown, might be added; perhaps that of Herbert Knowles is the only one which has lingered in any reader's memory. His "Verses in the Churchyard at Richmond" used to appear in those curious receptacles of little-known verse—school reading-books, and other collections. And Southey's name is still more closely connected with that of Caroline Bowles, whom he married in the end of his life—an event which, as so often happens, disturbs the perfection of his domestic story, without having resulted in any special personal advantage. She was the author of various stories, poems, and essays—the latter of which, in the form of a series of "Chapters on Churchyards," published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, are almost the only relics of her that have a faint survival

ROBERT SOUTHEY, born 1774 ; died 1843.

Published *Joan of Arc*, 1795 ; second edition, 1798.

*Letters from Spain and Portugal*, 1797.

*Thalaba*, 1801.

*Metrical Tales*, 1804.

*Madoc*, 1805.

*Letters from England by Don Manuel Espriella*,  
1807.

*Curse of Kehama*, 1810.

*Roderic, the Last of the Goths*, 1814.

*Life of Nelson*, 1813.

*Life of Wesley*.

*Life of Cowper*, 1837.

*The Doctor*, 1834.

He accepted the office of Poet-Laureate in 1813, and wrote the  
*Vision of Judgment* in 1821.

WAITER SAVAGE LANDOR, born 1775 ; died 1864.

Published *Early Poems*, in 1795.

*Gebir*, 1802.

*Simonidia, etc.*, 1805.

*Count Julian*, 1812.

*Idyllia Heroica* (Latin), 1814.

*Imaginary Conversations*, 1824 to 1846.

*Letters of a Conservative*, 1836.

*Satin on Satirists*, 1837.

*Dramas*, 1839.

*Last Fruit off an Old Tree*, 1853

*Dry Sticks Fagoted*, 1858.

HENRY KIRKE WHITE, born 1785 ; died 1806.

CAROLINE BOWLES (afterwards Southey), born 1787 ; died 1854.

Published *Chapters on Churchyards*, 1829.

THE LITERARY HISTORY  
OF ENGLAND



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THE  
LITERARY HISTORY  
OF  
ENGLAND

IN THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH AND BEGINNING  
OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

BY MRS. OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF 'MAKERS OF FLORENCE, ETC.

'Reading maketh a full man.' - Bacon, *On Study*.

'A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.' - MILTON, *Areopagitica*.

'Je ne voyage sans livres, ny en paix, ny en guerre. C'est la meilleure munition que j'aye trouvée à cet humain voyage.' - MONTAIGNE, *Livre iii. Chap. iii.*

'Books are the legacies that a great genius leaves to mankind.' - Addison, *Spectator*.

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# THE LITERARY HISTORY OF ENGLAND.

## CHAPTER I.

CHARLES LAMB—THOMAS DE QUINCEY.

AMID the greater forms that rose in the new flood of genius and life, in the end of the old century, to give the world assurance of a new epoch coming in, there is no attendant figure more attractive, more delightful, than that of Charles Lamb. No face can frown, no brow be overcast, when Elia—the gentle, the tender, the humorous, and ever-smiling, notwithstanding the deep dew of anguish which was never quite dried in his eyes—makes his appearance upon the scene. No man ever had a sweeter or more lightsome nature, and few men, even in this world of trouble, have been so heavily weighted. He was the schoolfellow of Coleridge at Christ's Hospital, and it is enough to warm the heart of all beholders to every wearer of the blue gown and yellow stockings to remember the two lads, who once strayed about the narrow streets in these habiliments, and ate the poor fare and bore the hardships which, in these days, were inseparable from the lot of a Blue-coat boy. Coleridge was a Grecian, a scholar, and credit to the school, although he prized the position so little that he desired (as is recorded) to be bound apprentice to a kind cobbler, who had been

good to him, instead of going to college; but Lamb had no such distinctions, and instead of accompanying his schoolfellow to Cambridge, entered the South Sea office at fifteen, the little salary he received there being of importance to his family. When he was eighteen, he was received into the India Office, and there spent his life. His father was no more than the servant of Mr. Salt, a bencher in the Inner Temple, and the little household was in the humblest circumstances, though of that class so common in books, so little common in reality—nature's gentlefolks. "It is hard," says De Quincey, with a grace of natural perception which makes his gossip and his tone of involuntary depreciation supportable, "it is hard, even for the practical philosopher, to distinguish aristocratic graces of manner and capacities of natural feeling in people whose very hearth and dress bear witness to the servile humility of their station. Yet such distinctions, as wild gifts of nature, timidly and half consciously asserted themselves in the unpretending Lambs. Already, in their favour there existed a silent privilege analogous to the famous one of Lord Kinsale. He, by special grant from the Crown, is allowed, when standing before the king, to forget that he is not himself a king: the bearer of that peerage, through all generations, has the privilege of wearing his hat in the royal presence. By a general, though tacit, concession of the same nature, the rising generation of the Lambs, John and Charles, the sons, and Mary Lamb, the only daughter, were permitted to forget that their grandmother had been a housekeeper for sixty years, and that their father had worn a livery."

Lamb was so completely above all petty pride, that he himself refers to this housekeeper-relation in one of the most delightful of his essays. He had nothing to conceal from the world. His humble position, his family, his domestic concerns, leaped into the sight of all men in one

brief and terrible moment, when the light-hearted youth was but twenty, a fauciful boy like others, writing sonnets to his mistress's eyebrow, and rhyming about a fairhaired maid. His father was old and feeble, his mother an invalid in her chair, and she who kept the little, dreary, sick household going, and cared for every one—Mary, ten years older than her brother—had always been the most tender of sisters and daughters. But there was insanity in their blood. Charles himself had spent "the six weeks that finished last year and began this" (1796) "very agreeably in a madhouse at Hoxton;" and Mary had suffered from more than one attack of the same kind. But nobody, it was evident, dreamt of any danger in connection with the gentle, homely young woman, the provider of her household, when one dreadful September day, when the cloth was laid for the midday dinner, a sudden fury of madness seized her, and with one of the knives from the table she killed the invalid mother whom she had been watching with unremitting tenderness night and day. "My poor, dear, dearest sister," writes Lamb to Coleridge, with an agony of restrained tears in the very sound of the words, "in a fit of insanity has been the death of her own mother. I was at hand only time enough to snatch the knife out of her grasp. She is at present in a madhouse, from whence I hear she must be removed to an hospital. God has preserved to me my senses; I eat and drink, and sleep, and have my judgment, I believe. My poor father was slightly wounded, and I am left to take care of him and my aunt. . . . Write as religious a letter as possible," the poor young man continues, "but no mention of what is gone and done with. 'The former things have passed away,' and I have something more to do than to feel. God Almighty has us all in his keeping." What a tragedy was this to break into the monotonous routine of the little rooms in



the city, where the old father, almost imbecile, the old aunt in not much better case, the mother helpless, were all dependent upon the care of that serene and loving Mary, who worked at her needlework to add to their comforts, and sacrificed her life and her rest to them, till this final blast of madness came. "My dear, dearest sister!" Lamb repeats again and again, his profound, heartrending pity for her—"the unhappy and unconscious instrument of the Almighty's judgments on our house,"—transcending every other feeling. Anxious calculations how to spare enough money to keep her in the asylum, where she had been taken, were the first efforts of his mind after this horrible shock; "If my father, an old servant maid, and I, can't live, and live comfortably, on £130 or £120 a year, we ought to burn by slow fires; and I almost would that Mary might not go into a hospital." Poor boy! he who made these calculations, and supplied the greater part of the tiny income, was but twenty; and in the midst of all these terrible troubles could not help a half sob of boyish misery, when he described himself as "starving at the India House since seven o'clock without any dinner," then getting home, "over worn and quite faint," to play cards with the sick and exacting old man, who was wholly dependent upon him for company and amusement: "I am got home at last," he writes, "and after repeated games at cribbage, have got my father's leave to write a while; with difficulty got it, for when I expostulated about playing any more, he aptly replied, 'If you won't play with me you might as well not come home at all.' The argument was unanswerable, and I set to afresh." In this gloomy scene, it was some consolation to him to recollect the nice "smoky little room at the Salutation" where Coleridge and he had been wont to meet. "I have never met with any one—nor shall meet with any one—who could or

can compensate me for the loss of your society," he says; and so said everybody who had ever known Coleridge—that strange sympathetic genius which fathomed, and embraced, and understood, all the moods of men. It is one of the incidental testimonies which touch our hearts most, that in Lamb's terrible trouble he should have been able to pour out his heart, unreservedly, into the bosom of this friend of friends.

Some time after the poor old father died, and Charles was fain to do what he had been longing for—to take his sister back to his home. There were great doubts and difficulties about it. The well-to-do relations, and chiefly the elder brother, thought it better she should remain where she was, getting rid of the sight, at least, of this great and abiding distress by keeping her in seclusion. But young Charles had a heart of a different fibre. There were difficulties, too, with the law, which had a right over her; but he surmounted all objections, and "satisfied all persons who had power to oppose her release, by his solemn engagement that he would take her under his care for life." He was impatient, even, to take upon him this burden which the other sensible people opposed, although the fear that her malady might break out again, tempered the joy of getting his dear companion back. This fear was but too well grounded. Mary Lamb—"the dear, dearest sister" for whom his heart bled—came back to the tender shelter of her young brother's little rooms and great pitying love; but it was not long before she "fell ill" again. "I was obliged to remove her yesterday," he says; "my heart is quite sunk, and I don't know where to look for relief. Mary will get better, but her constantly being liable to such relapses is dreadful. I am completely shipwrecked." So this dismal-happy life began. For nearly forty years they lived together, with many a subdued and gentle interval of happiness "between the acts,"

in such complete and perfect understanding, love, and amity, as few married pairs attain, inspired by the more delicate, more disinterested sentiment of fraternal devotion, which is, perhaps, the most exquisite and pure of all human loves. Mary, too, had something to bear in this long and tender union—her share of the burden, the woman's part, seeing her brother often do himself less than justice; for he was not perfect any more than happier men. But homely and poor as their life was at the best, and so often tragically interrupted, it would be wrong to say that it was an unhappy life. They went through the world together serenely and gaily, taking advantage of every gleam of sunshine, doing their duty as they could, in imperfection and heaviness, maintaining a brave front to fate. In the front row of the pit, among the bookstalls, in the streets which were familiar ground to them from their childhood, in their cheerful little rooms high up among the gables of the Temple, we see them always with a ray of genial light about them, sweet patience and gaiety, and humble, tender acquiescence in the inevitable. Of all the figures going about those streets, so many and with such varied features, there is no pair who so catch at our hearts. Tears come into our eyes while we listen to the puns and the jokes of "gentle-hearted Charles," and watch the ever expressive tender smile, not without an occasional shake of the head, with which the sister, for whom he had done so much, contemplates him. How poor are all the other people, taking their own way, indulging their own will, fighting hard against all the pinches of circumstances, to that beloved pair! Godwin, with his big head, philosophising, quarrelling, wondering why this woman and that was so insensible as not to wish to marry him; pretty Mrs. Inchbald, holding her own in her garret, blooming triumphant in the poorest gown, and boasting truly of her economies and charities; in after times, even the self-

willed passion of young Shelley and his Mary, defying law and every obstacle—romance and poetry if you please—how are they all a million times below the merest shadows on the pavement of that brother and sister!—“Lamb, the frolic and the gentle,” Elia, the whimsical, the tender, whose every tear suggests a smile, and every laugh a tear. Never were there two people more dearly consecrated to humanity by love and misery, and sacred patience and pain.

The very affection with which we regard them is a reason why we can say but little about them. Their lives are not to be described, nor are the essays of Elia to be quoted. Every worthy reader has his little niche for them, separate and sacred. Talfourd, in his *Final Memorials*, gives us a touching inscription written by Coleridge against the title of a poem dedicated in his youth to those dear friends. It is the poem in which, from his “lime tree bower”—where he was confined by an accident while they were visiting him at Nether Stowey—he follows in imagination their breezy walk “on springy heath, along the hill-top edge,” or threading the echoing dale among the woods, then emerging forth beneath wide heaven to see the brightness of the champaign lying before them, fields and meadows, and steepled villages, and the “smooth clear blue” of the sea—

“Yes, they wander on  
In gladness all ; and thou, methinks, most glad,  
My gentle-hearted Charles ; for thou hast pined  
And hungered after nature many a year  
In the great city pent, winning thy way •  
With sad yet patient soul through evil and pain,  
And strange calamity.”

Against this, long long after, Coleridge, in his shipwrecked and lonely shelter at Highgate, wrote the following inscription :—

Ch. and Mary Lamb,  
 dear to my heart, yea,  
 as it were my heart.  
 S. T. C., *Æt.* 63, 1834.  
 1797.  
 1834.

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37 years.

This little record, like a stone upon a grave—yet not a grave, a memorial and pledge of something never to die—expresses the very soul of veneration, pity, and tenderness which their names call forth—a pity which is almost remorse: for why should the rest of us pass through life so much more easily than they?

Lamb, the friend of Coleridge, and through him of all the poetical brotherhood, began his own literary life with a gentle strain of poetry, among which are some verses, well known by quotation, which have real melody as well as meaning. Such is "Hester," an address to a dead girl, which embodies that warm human incredulity as to death, which is one of the most strange yet most universal of sentiments, the resistance of the immortal in us to the most heartrending evidence of fact. She has been a month dead, yet no force can make him think of her and the grave together;

"My sprightly neighbour, gone before  
 To that unknown and silent shore!  
 Shall we not meet as heretofore,  
 Some summer morning:

"When from thy cheerful eyes a ray  
 Hath struck a bliss upon the day,  
 A bliss that would not pass away,  
 A sweet forewarning?"

But verse was not Lamb's method. He published a tragedy, "John Woodvil," which was massacred in the *Edinburgh Review*—not without reason: his friends them-

selves all deprecating the unlucky poem, and no one striking a blow for it. Later he tried a farce—"Mr. H——," which was accepted by the manager at Drury Lane, and acted, but failed. "Mary is a little cut at the ill success of Mr. H——," Lamb writes; "I know you'll be sorry—but never mind. We are determined not to be cast down. I am going to leave off tobacco, and then we must thrive. A smoking man must write smoky farces." . . . "We are pretty stout about it," he says to another correspondent; "have had plenty of condoling friends: but after all we had rather it succeeded." These little failures, however—though the shock of the hisses ("Hang the word, I write it like kisses; how different!" he writes) must have had no small effect upon Lamb's nervous, sensitive, and love-loving nature—were of small importance in his life. As soon as Elia stepped out into the world (in the pages of the *London Magazine*) his gentle immortality was secure. Never was there more delightful playing with life and all its mysteries and depths, more soft and laughing banter, more tender thoughtfulness. Especially when he spoke of himself, and his own restrained and subdued life, was Lamb exquisite; the "sort of double singleness" in which he and his sister lived, their harmony, their little differences, their diversified tastes, their mutual recollections—nothing could be more delicately set down; and when he rises into the fun of the roast pig, or expatiates with humorous tenderness upon "the innocent blacknesses," the poor little sweeps for whose hard lot no alleviation of machinery in the shape of long-jointed brushes had yet been thought of—or falls into the vein of delicate sentiment in which he discourses with his "dream children," there is no more delightful companion. Tragedy and farce alike might refuse him; but here was a path of his own not obtrusive, inviting but little the fancy of the multitude, where he was supreme. De

Quincey talks of him as one of those authors who will be found to rest much of the interest which surrounds them upon their essential non-popularity. But we cannot consent that Elia is unpopular. His book has not only the delicate aroma which suits the most cultivated, but a something of native fragrance which appeals to the multitude as well.

There are many impatient readers who are not capable of this kind of literature at all; who, indeed, are not to be called readers at all, but on the one side workmen in mines, out of which they mean to draw substantial advantage: or on the other like the easy audience of the Eastern story-teller—romance-devourers, seekers after excitement, if not in act and deed, in narrative and history, in something that thrills and tingles the blood with the keen vicissitudes of a rapid tale. But no true reader, wherever found, can fail to acknowledge the power of Elia. He is, in the best sense of the word, one who writes for writing's sake—not because he has much to tell us, but because it is a pleasure to him to make friends with us, to jest and sigh and trifle, to play some whimsical trick upon us, to transport us in a moment, all unwittingly, from laughter into weeping, to play upon all the strings of our hearts. Writing of this description is apt to be considered by the ignorant the easiest of all manner of literary composition. But it is not so; indeed, it is the most difficult of all, rejecting compulsory and prescribed subjects, and following its own sweet will and nothing else. Something of Addison is in Lamb; something of the Browns and Burtons in whom he delighted. He wanted no subject to discourse upon, nor would tolerate any bondage. He liked to wander where he would, to talk as he liked. He had his daily work of another description—folios to write, as he says, a whole library of them, which nobody read. And thus his

literary work represented to him, not a life's toil, but the most exquisite diversion, a pleasant communion with minds unknown, and equally pleasant agitation and agreeable excitement of possible controversy and discussion with the friends visible who would meet, and note, and criticise. It gave expression to all the higher aims of his life, and to the gentle genius not great enough for action, which yet was true genius in its way. He was, beside such amount of classic lore as came from his early-abandoned studies, a scholar in English: for there seems no reason why the word should not be applied to the student of our own wealthy literature as well as to any other. His *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets* was one of the first efforts made to revive the knowledge—sometimes, as contemporary critics declared, not much to edification in a moral point of view, but of great importance in that of poetry—of the lesser lights of the Shakspearian age; and shows the finest critical perception, as well as the most delicate poetical enthusiasm. Lamb was, in short, a man of native culture, differing as much from the Hazlitts and Holcrofts as night from day, though all his intellectual training had been accomplished at Christ's Hospital before he was fifteen. But there are men who are born with this fine quality—*educazione*, as the Italians say—an accomplished mind, as our grandfathers called it—whatever their external means of training may be.

Nothing beyond this happened to Lamb in his happy-melancholy life. He retired from his office after more than thirty years' service, on a pension, and thought himself blessed; but afterwards wearied, as so many men do, for the wholesome harsh routine which had given a backbone to his life. And all through this long course of years the vicissitudes of his domestic existence continued the same. Periodically Mary "fell ill." That "Mary sends her love *from home*," that "Mary is well," is the



key-note of his letters, put at the very beginning before any usual superscription. And when she felt the fit coming on, the two took their way from the recesses of the Temple out to the suburbs, in which her place of confinement was, he going with her to the dreadful door, she voluntarily putting herself into the prison. All this is so well known, that it seems a useless repetition to tell it here. Mary and he together, moved by a desire on her part to aid in the expenses of the little household, composed the *Tales from Shakspeare*, which have always kept their popularity; and Mary alone was the author of *Mrs. Leicester's School*. Thus, even literature was in common between them. But Mary had no hand, except as one of the subjects, in Elia. There she sits, Bridget Elia, by the fireside for ever, with that tender observer by her. "I for one," he says, "find in myself no sort of disposition to go out upon the mountains, like the rash king's offspring, to bewail my celibacy." The scene is softly silent: the low room hung round with dark Hogarth prints, far too harsh and pungent for such a kind interior; the fire flickering between them; he "hanging over, for the thousandth time, some passage in old Burton, or one of his strange contemporaries;" and she, on the other side, in quicker flow of interest, "abstracted in some modern tale or adventure, whereof our common reading-table is daily fed with assiduously fresh supplies." The books that supplied this table in a constantly renewed stream—with old Burton slowly mused over in the other arm-chair, outlasting nearly a hundred—would be perhaps Mrs. Radcliffe's mysterious romances, or the gloomy pages of *Caleb Williams*, fresh from the press, or the *Simple Story*—books which we only come upon in obscure corners now, even of that "gentleman's library," which would not be complete without them. "Narrative teases me," he says, for to his eccentric humorous genius con-

tinuity is a trouble, and he loves to pause at any moment and follow out quaint associations and far-reaching links of fancy; but "she must have a story—well, ill, or indifferently told, so there be life stirring in it, and plenty of good or evil accidents." It has been her lot "to have had for her associates and mine free-thinkers, leaders, and disciples of novel philosophies and systems; but she neither wrangles with nor accepts their opinions. That which was good and venerable to her when a child retains its authority over her mind still. She never juggles or plays tricks with her understanding. We are both of us inclined to be a little too positive, and I have observed the result of our disputes to be uniformly this—that in matters of fact, dates, and circumstances, it turns out that I was in the right, and my cousin in the wrong. But when we have differed on moral points, upon something proper to be done or let alone, whatever heat of opposition or steadiness of conviction I set out with, I am sure always in the long run to be brought over to her way of thinking." But she has an awkward trick of reading in company, he adds, that his picture may not be without a tiny shadow; sometimes she will answer an irrelevant yes or no to a question; perhaps when she is in full tide of a story, will not pause to listen to some stammering witty comment, some quaint train of thought leading off from these old fields of letters through which he is meandering to lands unknown. One can see how this happens—not often, for her sympathy with him is boundless: but now and then, when perhaps Miss Milner's story is coming to a crisis, or Caleb about to denounce his persecutor. Where did they get this innate unquestionable refinement that goes against every tradition? Here is how Mary Lamb, or Bridget Elia, came by it. "She was tumbled early, by accident or design, into a spacious closet of good old English reading (no

doubt in the great country house, where the grandmother was the housekeeper, and where, in all probability, none of the young ladies of the family were half so fortunate) without much selection or prohibition, and browsed at will upon that fair and wholesome pasturage. Had I twenty girls (cries Mary's brother) they should be brought up exactly in this fashion. I know not whether their chance in wedlock might not be diminished by it; but I can answer for it that it makes (if the worst comes to the worst) most incomparable old maids."

Thus they lived together, and kept each other happy—between the acts, as Lamb says. The acts were those terrible intervals when she was away in the asylum and he alone. While they lived in the Temple, the best and happiest part of their lives, the brother and sister held little weekly assemblies, which Talfourd, their biographer compares to the more splendid gatherings in Holland House. In the one, everything that was noble and imposing, almost royal—stately hospitality, guests honoured and proud to find themselves there; in the other, the homeliest friendly meeting, the fire playing cheerfully, lighting up the low dark walls; the whist-tables set out; the substantial, plain supper in the corner; "Lamb himself, yet unrelaxed by the glass, sitting with a sort of Quaker primness at the whist-table, the gentleness of his melancholy smile half lost in his intentness in the game." But when the moderate play was over, and the supper discussed, and "the hot water and its accompaniments" produced, the conversation became more animated. "Hazlitt, catching the influence of the spirit from which he had just begun to abstain, utters some fine criticism with struggling emphasis. Lamb stammers out puns, suggestive of wisdom, for happy Barron Field to admire and echo; the various dribblets of talk combine into a stream, while Miss Lamb moves gently about to see that

each modest stranger is duly served, turning now and then an anxious, loving eye on Charles, which is softened into a half-humorous expression of resignation to inevitable fate when he mixes his second tumbler." Sometimes Wordsworth would appear at rare intervals, and to hear him recite the noblest passages of his own poetry, and discuss its theories and power, drew the little company together in rapt attention; while still more when Coleridge came, every other question was laid aside, "argument and humorous criticism were hushed;" and if a card-table had been filled, or a dispute begun before he was excited to continuous speech, his gentle voice, undulating in music, soon

"Suspended whist, and took with ravishment  
The thronging audience."

There were other meetings too in which Elia was a conspicuous figure. Among them certain periodical assemblages at the *Courier* office, where, as we are told by a witness quoted by De Quincey, "Lamb said little except when an opening arose for a pun. And how effectual that sort of small shot was from him I need not say to anybody who remembers his infirmity of stammering, and his dexterous management of it for purposes of light and shade. He was often able to train the roll of stammers into settling upon the words immediately preceding the effective one, by which means the keynote of the jest, or sarcasm, benefiting by the sudden liberation of his embargoed voice, was delivered with the force of a pistol shot. That stammer was worth an annuity to him, as an ally of his wit." Many people will remember the same skill, used not as an ally of wit indeed, which he scarcely possessed, but as a picturesque peculiarity, enhancing the power of his rolling sentences, in the late Charles Kingsley. But Lamb's habitual talk consisted of those random shots of playful wit, odd suggestive outbursts, in which there

was often something much deeper than met the eye. "The mercurialities of Lamb were infinite," says De Quincey, "and always uttered in a spirit of absolute recklessness for the quality or the prosperity of the sally. It seemed to liberate his spirit from some burthen of blackest melancholy which oppressed it when he had thrown off a jest." But the intellectual talk which young De Quincey hoped for when he dined alone with the brother and sister, and was left with his host after dinner, did not come, and the disappointment gives occasion for a pretty bit of description, which brings before us, in an affecting and attractive picture, the worn and pensive aspect of "the man of mirth:"—

"Over Lamb at this period of his life there passed regularly, after taking wine, a brief eclipse of sleep. It descended upon him as softly as a shadow. In a gross person, laden with superfluous flesh and sleeping heavily, this would have been disagreeable; but in Lamb, thin even to meagreness, spare and wiry as an Arab of the desert, or as Thomas Aquinas wasted by scholastic vigils, the affection of sleep seemed rather a network of aerial gossamer than of earthly cobweb, more like a golden haze falling upon him gently from the heavens than a cloud exhaling upwards from the flesh. Motionless in his chair as a bust, breathing so gently as scarce to seem alive, he presented the image of repose midway between life and death, like the repose of sculpture; and to one who knew his history, a repose affectingly contrasting with the calamities and internal storms of his life. I have heard more persons than I can now distinctly recall, observe of Lamb while sleeping that his countenance in that state assumed an expression almost seraphic, from its intellectual beauty of outline, its childlike simplicity, and its benignity."

The soft exhaustion of this sketch hushes and softens the conclusion of the story. Lamb died ten years before his sister. The concluding chapters of his life are deeply sad, as the last chapter almost invariably is—more sad by far in the dejection of failing strength and ending hope than the harder struggle of mid life, with its

keener pangs but counterbalancing enjoyments. Their suburban lodgings were not so cheerful or so congenial as the little chambers on the top story, in the beloved regions of the Temple. During the last year of his life, Lamb, unable to bear the constant separations, went to live with the people who took charge of his sister in her moments of illness, and so was able to remain with her even during that trial. He describes this pathetically in a letter to a friend:—

“I bear my privations very well. I am not in the depths of desolation as heretofore. It is no new thing for me to be left to my sister. When she is not violent, her rambling chat is better to me than the sense and vanity of this world. Her heart is obscured, not buried; it breaks out occasionally; and one can discern a strong mind struggling with the billows that have gone over it. I could be nowhere happier than under the same roof with her. Her memory is unnaturally strong; and from ages past, if so we may call the earliest records of our poor life, she fetches thousands of names and things that never would have dawned on me again, and thousands from the ten years she lived before me. For twelve hours incessantly she will pour out, without intermission, all her past life, forgetting nothing, pouring out name after name as in a dream. Sense and nonsense, truths and errors huddled together, a medley between inspiration and possession. What things we are! I know you will bear with me talking of these things. It seems to ease me, for I have nobody to tell these things to now.”

He died the same year (1834), when poor Mary was in one of her aberrations, happily for her. When she came to herself her constant evening pilgrimage was to his grave, till friends persuaded her to remove from the sad vicinity. She was, indeed, no longer able to care for herself, but lingered on, oftener mad than sane, till 1847, when she died a very old woman, and was delivered from all her troubles.

Shortly before his death Lamb had borrowed of Mr. Cary, Phillips's *Theatrum Poctarum Anglicanorum*, which, when returned by Mr. Moxon after the event, was found

with the leaf folded down at the account of Sir Philip Sydney. Its receipt was acknowledged by the following lines :—

“ So should it be, my gentle friend ;  
Thy leaf last closed at Sydney's end.  
Thou too, like Sydney, wouldst have given  
The water, thirsting and near heaven ;  
Nay were it wine filled to the brim,  
Thou hadst look'd hard, but given, like him.

“ And art thou mingled then among  
Those famous sons of ancient song ?  
And do they gather round, and praise  
Thy relish of their nobler lays ?  
Waxing in mirth to hear thee tell  
With what strange mortals thou didst dwell ;  
At thy quaint sallies more delighted,  
Than any's long among them lighted !

“ 'Tis done ; and thou hast joined a crew,  
To whom thy soul was justly due ;  
And yet I think, where'er thou be,  
They'll scarcely love thee more than we.”

This flower thrown upon Lamb's grave was from the hand of the first translator of Dante, a gentle soul not uncongenial with his own.

Before we leave the elder group of poets who formed the age, and to whose society Lamb's figure and name belong of right, though his poetic rank is low, we must take a step forward in chronology to include the strange little wanderer in “a world not realised,” from whom we have repeatedly quoted—the delicate mind and warped nature, always wild, insubordinate, and deficient of all rule, yet exquisite in expression and fine in thought, of Thomas De Quincey. He who hung about the poets and their recollections all his life is likewise mingled in the web of their existence with almost inextricable closeness, and it would be unkind, even if it were not useless, to attempt

to untwine him from the connection in which his best years and best feelings were engaged. When he left the Lakes and their associations he bent his steps northward to associate himself with one of the groups we have shortly to discuss, so that still his place is here though he stands lower in Time. He was the son of a Manchester merchant, born in a wealthy house, and with a fortune sufficient to keep him at least from being prematurely involved in the struggle for existence; but, wilful and fantastical being as he always was, he broke away from the restraining care of his guardians while he was still very young, and plunged, a strange philosophical musing little vagrant, still a boy in years, and not more than a child in appearance, into want and misery, and the London streets, opening up a curious dreamy vista into dismal regions such as are seldom made plain to other eyes than those of their unfortunate denizens. After this he went to Oxford, with a truce patched up between him and those who had authority over him, and stayed long enough to go through some part of his examinations for his degree, with credit; but driven aside by some offence, or blown away by some caprice, left the place before his "schools" were over, and, like so many of his greater contemporaries, never took his degree. This was the more unfortunate that he too was a scholar by nature, with the strongest receptive powers, and ought to have been, but for that wayward mood in him, the ornament of a college. But the Universities in those days evidently had no power of attracting to them the first intelligences of the time.

While he was at Oxford he came under the influence of the *Lyrical Ballads*, and was moved with all the enthusiasm of a convert in the midst of opposition, for the new poetry, and the great new gods of it, whom most men blasphemed. His first connection with them was



by means of correspondence with Wordsworth, who replied kindly to his youthful effusion of faith and worship; and De Quincey, it is said, travelled all the way to the Lake Country to make the poet's acquaintance; but, seized with sudden timidity, returned without daring to show himself. A few years later, being in the neighbourhood of Bristol, he went to Nether Stowey on a pilgrimage to see Coleridge, who had removed from that place long before, but was, as it chanced, not far off on a visit. De Quincey, in the extremity of his devotion, followed him. "In riding down the main street of Bridgewater I noticed a gateway corresponding to the description given me. Under this was standing and gazing about him a man," the very "noticeable man, with large gray eyes," of whom he was in search. It was nothing out of the way to Coleridge that men should come riding out of the unknown in search of him, to hear him talk, and draw a little to refresh their souls out of his unfathomable wealth and life; and he received the pilgrim after the confusion of the first moment with generous hospitality. It is characteristic of De Quincey that he cannot give his account of this first meeting, which is delightful, without introducing "a lady whose face showed some prettiness of rather a commonplace order," and plunging into those secrets of domestic life with which the reader has no concern, be they true or false. This is his weakness throughout. His account of the great poets with whom he was permitted to live, often beautifully told in choice English and with graphic grace, is spoiled to the reader by disagreeable investigations below the surface of family life, and repetition of confidences which, if made to him at all, were certainly not made to be brought forth upon the house-tops. This early beginning of his intercourse with Coleridge had, however, a distinct memorial enough. After the delights of the first visit, in which, as soon as

they had gone through the first preliminaries of acquaintance, "Coleridge, like some great river, the Orellana or St. Lawrence, that having been checked and fretted by rocks or thwarting islands, suddenly recovers its volume of waters and its mighty music—swept at once, as if returning to his natural business, into a continuous strain of eloquent dissertation, certainly the most novel, the most finely illustrated, and traversing the most spacious fields of thought by transitions the most just and logical it was possible to conceive." De Quincey returned to Bristol, and there made acquaintance with the kind Cottle, the bookseller, from whom he inquired into the circumstances of the poet who had so dazzled and entranced him, with the desire of making some offering that might be of service. The result was that Coleridge accepted a gift of three hundred pounds from the young enthusiast, who had but lately come into possession of his fortune, and was full of natural enthusiasm and generosity. It is the drawback of all such generosity that it is difficult to shut out of our mind an uncomfortable feeling in respect to the recipient of the gift; a feeling which in this case he himself, it is evident, shared most deeply, as may be seen from the agitated letter to Cottle, in which he accepts it, necessity and gratitude struggling with the pangs of wounded pride and conscious failure. It was supposed by the young man that Coleridge was unaware who his benefactor was; but he did know it, sooner or later.

Shortly after this the young worshipper of genius (he was twenty-two, and the poets were from ten to fifteen years his seniors) accompanied Mrs. Coleridge to the north. She was going with her children back to Keswick, where she had some years before received the Southey family, and where they were now awaiting her. It was a great chance for the shy little student: for Mrs.

Coleridge was to visit the Wordsworths on the way, and this opened to him at once, on the footing of intimacy, the other two poetic households, in which, for the time, all the fortune of poetry seemed enclosed. He shared a post-chaise for the long journey with that poor lady, once the pensive Sara of Coleridge's tender fancy, but whose commonplace prettiness and ordinariness little De Quincey now felt himself free to remark upon. It is easy to understand how the young man's heart must have beat when he came in sight of the white roadside cottage, which he had seen a year before from the other side of the lake without daring to approach nearer. Now, with little Hartley, strange poet-child, not the least remarkable of the party, running before him, and all the circumstances of an expected and welcome arrival, he was brought to these genial gates. The minute description he gives of the house and its inmates is very pleasant. Evidently Wordsworth and all his belongings were more sacred to the observer than Coleridge, whose brotherhood of pain and weakness seems to have mingled in the mind of the man, who was hereafter to be known as the Opium Eater, something of contempt rather than of fellow-feeling. Reflected from his higher reverence for Wordsworth was a respect for everybody at Grasmere—the poet's wife, who could say nothing but "God bless you," as well as the inspired Dorothy, she who was the fountainhead of finest influence, the more spiritual part of the genius which filled the house. After a few days in this idyllic house of poverty (or, at least, the most restricted living) and poetry, De Quincey set out in Wordsworth's close companionship for Keswick. Part of the way they walked together like old and familiar friends; and Wordsworth, with that confidence and readiness to communicate which was characteristic of the brotherhood, read the "White Doe of Rylstone" to his

new friend on one of their halts. The next evening the pedestrians arrived at the other house, where, as the sounds of an arrival made themselves heard, "Mr. Coleridge and a gentleman of very striking appearance" came to the door to welcome them. This was Southey. Thus the journey was like an ideal progress; the very names of the three families, the magical landscapes round them, the talk of poems written and unwritten, of philosophies musical as Apollo's lute, filled the air with strange enchantment—in the midst of which stands the small eccentric figure of the new-comer, like an eldritch grown-up child, with wonderful ideas gleaming out in his talk, and a great awe and admiration in his mind—yet with no true faculty of worship in him, but much of the temper of the valet to whom his master is no hero.

De Quincey settled at Grasmere in the white roadside cottage which Wordsworth had once occupied, a short time after this introduction to the gods of the region: and lived there for eleven years, during which time many things happened to him. His picture of the pleasant country life, so fresh and simple, is our best way of knowing what these great brethren were about in this mid period of their career. If the little subacid tone in De Quincey's descriptions—a sort of amiable spite, and desire to show the reader that the gods be but men after all, and that he himself saw through them—is unpleasant to some readers, it will perhaps increase the interest of others, to whom, without a little depreciation, no picture looks true. It is in his favour that Wordsworth's children grew very fond of De Quincey; he was a something between themselves and the legitimate elders, the grown-up people to whom the little man could scarcely be imagined to belong. Some way off, even farther than a country neighbour is permitted to be, was Charles Lloyd, who has been referred to in a previous chapter,

the "young friend" who "proposed to domesticate" himself with Coleridge in the early days of Nether Stowey, a feeble brother, subject to melancholy delusions, and with a dark vein of religious despair running through his gentle life, but of refined mind, and even mild poetic faculty, enough, according to the kind estimate of the poets, to give him some slight footing among them in addition to the claims of friendship. They were all very kind in their estimation of the poetical satellites who circulated about them, conscientiously criticising their gentle sonnets, and applauding the little verses which the rest of us, on our low level, are apt to be impatient of. Lloyd had circulated about among them during their earlier days, going from Coleridge to Southey, and thence to Lamb, somewhat endangering, for the moment, their cordial fellowship; for nobody likes to be deserted by the friend who is "domesticated" with him, for the sake of another friend, however dear. All those little ac- - culties, however, were over before now, and Lloyd had settled among them as a neighbour, taking, by reason of his ample means, a prominent part in the little society. De Quincey speaks of the "judicious assortment of dinner parties," and the "gaiety of *soirées dunsantes*" at this friendly house. It was there he saw for the first time a man as unlike himself as it is possible to imagine—one who had been a hero of the Oxford world, while the quaint little undergraduate of Worcester buried himself in his rooms, or wandered by night in out-of-the-way haunts, apart from the cheerful current of the general life. It was only now, from a corner of the dancing-room at Low Brathay, that he saw his contemporary, the boast of Magdalen, the hero of a thousand adventures, John Wilson of Elleray, the happy, young, triumphant athlete, whose life had as yet been signalised by no great intellectual effort. Shortly after they met at Words-

worth's, and were then introduced to each other. They became friends at once, and remained so as long as they lived, in the strangest union. During the early years of their friendship they wandered together over the hills and dales, as oddly consorted a couple as it is possible to imagine, Wilson with a largeness about him which was not all size, an expansion and bigness of soul as well as body, a dauntless athleticism of the mind as well as of the thews and sinews, joyous, fearless, all-adventuring; and by his side the odd, sensitive, abstract little man, light and shivery as a bird upon the bough, full of dreams and visions, a being with as little flesh and blood as possible—sufficient and no more to house his soul in. It is pleasant to realise them as they went along in prolonged and endless talk, such as they both loved, with enthusiasms which were the same yet so different, and minds occupied on similar matters, though from points of view so unlike.

Nothing could be more strange and unlike other people, indeed, than the little dreamer in the Grasmere cottage. He had been an opium eater, or rather drinker, his decanter of laudanum holding the place of wholesome wine on his table for some time, and under that influence was subject to the most lovely and terrible visions, the one countering the other. Amid the roses that covered his walls outside, and the books which crowded them within, he sat and mused, and dreamed, his imagination wandering in the most curious byways. At night he sallied forth upon long silent walks. "What I liked in these solitary rambles," he says, "was to trace the course of the evening through its household hieroglyphics from the windows which I passed, or saw; to see the blazing fire shining through the windows of the houses, lurking in nooks far apart from neighbours; sometimes in solitudes that seemed abandoned to the owl to catch the

sounds of household mirth; then some miles further to perceive the time of going to bed; then the gradual sinking to silence of the house; then the drowsy reign of the cricket; at intervals to hear church clocks, or a little solitary chapel bell, under the brow of mighty hills, proclaiming the hours of the night, and flinging out their sudden knells over the graves where 'the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.'" This fresh glimpse of the dim and narrow valleys, with the twinkles of light here and there, the veil of night over them, the stars twinkling on the hill-tops, the distant clocks striking out of the gloom, the sleeping houses by which the night-wanderer strayed, is wonderfully perfect in its kind. He loved nature, and had an eye to see her meanings, without any of the drawbacks which interfered with his appreciation of men. But when sickness and sorrow came among the children of the Wordsworth family, the grief of their strange little neighbour was heartrending. They were more afraid of breaking to him the news of a child's death than to the father. He speaks of "the fierce convulsion of grief" which "mastered his faculties" on the occasion of the little Catherine's death—with a voice which, years after, is still hysterical with the unwonted passion—after spending the night upon her grave, "in an intensity of sick frantic yearning after the darling of my heart;" and when another child died, Wordsworth himself communicated the news "most tenderly and lovingly, with heavy sorrow for you, my dear friend," as if the stranger had been more to the infant than himself.

Whether the state of nervous excitement in which his opium kept him had anything to do with this excessive tender-heartedness, it seems uncharitable to inquire; but before De Quincey left his Grasmere cottage, the agonies of mind to which his indulgence in opium exposed him had become almost insupportable. He had married in

the meantime the daughter of a dalesman—a woman as tender, patient, and all-enduring as any who ever stood between a drunkard and his fate. And how much is that to say! He never failed in loving appreciation of her, though he filled her life with troubles. But the strange nature, full of vagaries, and unaffected by any sense of duty, which De Quincey had from his cradle, and the growth of self-indulgence and opium, made an end before long of fortune, such as it was. All unfitted for the struggles of the world, and to work for his daily subsistence, he had to do so *tant bien que mal*, going off on forlorn expeditions to London to seek work, and making equally perilous attempts in Westmoreland to set up newspapers and organise literary undertakings. In the same way, and with the same futile end, as has been recorded, Coleridge, some time before, had begun the publication of the *Friend*, which had a brief existence of some eight-and-twenty numbers, a confused subscription list, and a range of subjects far too serious and profound to attract ordinary readers. De Quincey's ideas soared no higher than a *Westmoreland Gazette*, but he hoped to "float" this triumphantly in all the learned circles of the land by means of the exertions of his friends. All this, however, was failure unmitigated; and troubles grew, and with them that dark assistant out of the pains of the moment, and creator of new troubles, the ever-ready drug, the "doses of oblivion." It is very strange that independently, not influencing each other, two men in the same small circle, Coleridge and De Quincey, should both have been the victims of this living death.

The *Confessions of an Opium Eater*, which were published in the *London Magazine* in 1821, is the most important of De Quincey's works. His disquisitions on the poets will always be interesting to the students of the period, and of that great brotherhood—but they are



injured by many traces of that familiarity which breeds contempt. We want, indeed, to know the truth about the greatest representatives of the age, but not to have a piece of adverse gossip, or the repetition of an ill-advised confidence. De Quincey's descriptions and bursts of poetic musing are often brilliant, exquisite in form and language. Nobody puts better on his canvas an aspect of nature, or gives us in more detailed and faithful circumstance the surroundings of a human scene. He is not so happy with men, because, for one thing, of his habit of detractation, which forbade him from seeing into what Wordsworth prosaically calls "the very heart of the machine;" and finally, perhaps, from his own eccentricities and out-of-the-way thoughts. He wrote many volumes of essays, and criticisms of various kinds, and his best work has found a place among English classics. The delicate wit and irony of the essay upon "Murder as one of the Fine Arts" has moved many a reader to such a laugh, tempered with a thrill of visionary excitement and horror, as is rare among the laughter of literature. It is an undue honour to this curious little monster in literature to place him by the side of Lamb; but the connection of both with the greater group of poets supplies an arbitrary link of association.

CHARLES LAMB, born 1775 : died 1834.

Published Poems with Coleridge, 1797.

Blank Verses (with Charles Lloyd), 1798.

John Woodvil, 1801.

Tales from Shakspeare (with Mary Lamb), 1807.

Specimens of English Dramatic Poetry, 1808.

Poetry for Children, 1809.

Essays of Elia, 1822.

(Originally published in *London Magazine*.)

Album Verses, 1830.

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THOMAS DE QUINCEY, born 1785 ; died 1859.

Published Confessions of an English Opium Eater, 1822.

(Originally published in *London Magazine*).

Essays under various titles.

Essenism, The Cæsars, etc.

Autobiography, Recollections of Lake Poets, etc.

Suspiria de Profundis.

(Originally published in various periodicals ; reissued in complete and revised edition. 1862.)

## CHAPTER II.

## THE CRITICS.

THE art of criticism can never be a heroic art. Of its nature and essence it is secondary, since until there is a literature to be judged, no tribunal of judgment can be formed. It is at best but the aftermath of every intellectual harvest, and it is often the very last and feeblest growth of an exhausted soil. But the more literature grows, and the more widely education is diffused, the more this secondary art will spread and flourish. It is not possible, when the world of readers is extended to the very limits of space, that they can, all, or even a tithe of them, judge for themselves; it is not possible even that they should know the mere names of the books which are hurrying from all the printing-presses with a view to their edification; and thus the race of middle-men become indispensable in letters, as in so many other spheres. It has come in our own days to unparalleled importance, and is almost worthy to be counted as one of the learned professions—at least, if not one of the learned professions, as a practical byway in which a large number of intelligences nominally belonging to these, get bread and get importance. It is a dangerous art—dangerous to the public, who are often badly guided, though the perils in this respect are largely modified by a native instinct, which keeps the mass tolerably right

whatever advice may be lavished on it; dangerous to authors, who are often injured and irritated, and sometimes embittered beyond redemption, by assaults made in pure *gaieté de cœur*; and, above all, dangerous to the critics themselves, who can hardly fail, in the long run, to feel themselves as superior in reality to the writers they discuss as they seem at the moment of discussion by means of the artificial platform to which their judgeship raises them. As the office is voluntary, and as it is most frequently anonymous, it is a most fruitful source of literary impertinence and flippancy, and very destructive to every natural sentiment of respect and veneration. When a young man, fresh from college, with no particular qualification but the gift of writing tolerable prose, finds himself set up on a veiled and visionary throne, from which he can throw forth his thunderbolts on the loftiest head, with the certainty of producing more amusement the more daring his strictures and the sharper his hits may be, he would be more than mortal if he did not yield to the temptation. Therefore, in all ages critics have been the natural enemies, the disgust, or the terror of authors: and in proportion as they have been wittily insolent and cleverly unjust, have they been relished by the keen appetite of the public and encouraged by the crowd. There are few things so amusing as to read a really "slashing article"—except perhaps to write it. It is infinitely easier and gayer work than a well-weighed and serious criticism, and will always be more popular. The lively and brilliant examples of the art which dwell in the mind of the reader are invariably of this class. If we remember with horror the article that was said (but with very partial truth) to have killed poor Keats, we prepare ourselves for pleasure when we see Macaulay draw a book towards him and whet the knife which is "to cut it up." In the present day of critical news-

papers, those which we know as ill-natured are always the most popular. It affords opportunities for making fun of the finest genius to those who are acquainted with the way of it: and in no other way can a little faculty go so far.

It is not our intention by these prefatory remarks to undervalue the wonderful new development of the art of criticism which took place in the beginning of the present century. We think, indeed, that, like so many other things, having been unduly celebrated to all the echoes as something more brilliant than was ever known before, it has fallen into somewhat unmerited shadow now. Those who desire to know what criticism was before its time, may judge by such productions as Gifford's *Baviad* and *Maviad*, in which, indeed, the authors criticised are of so small an order that it is scarcely necessary to name them in a history of literature, though they might afford an amusing chapter from their very foolishness, did space permit. The follies of Della Crusca, the Laura Matildas, the Julias, the Edwins and Annas, were all swept away, it is said, by Gifford's sharp birch broom: but the delicacies of style with which the critic treated his subject are remarkable, to say the least. "Most of these fashionable writers were connected with the public prints," he says of one group of harmless rhymesters; "Della Crusca was a worthy coadjutor of the mad and malignant idiot who conducted the *World*; Edwin and Anna Matilda were favoured contributors to several; and Laura Maria, from the sums squandered on puffs, could command a corner in all. This wretched woman, indeed, in the wane of her beauty, fell into merited poverty, exchanged poetry for politics, and wrote abusive trash against the Government, at the rate of two guineas a week, for the *Morning Post*." This was the style which the literary critic used in these days; and when we add that the "wretched

woman " thus described had sinned no further against literature than by sending foolish verses to a newspaper, the reader will be doubly impressed by the value of this critic's corrections. Southey and Coleridge were then supporting their young households by the two guineas weekly, which each of them earned by verses in the *Morning Post* or *Chronicle*, and there was nothing either undignified or unusual in this mode of publication. But Coleridge and Southey were higher game, and Gifford does not seem to have touched them with his rude hand. He was one of those writers whom, having no other distinction, and no special place in literature, we can call only literary men. He has a kind of mild poetical standing on the score of some "copies of verses," one of which—"I wish I were where Anna lies"—is very little superior to the productions he demolished so ruthlessly, and has the additional disadvantage of recalling to us, and risking a comparison with, one of the most touching of primitive ballads, the heartrending history of Helen of Kirkconnel,<sup>1</sup> well known to all lovers of song. But except by these verses, Gifford's sole claim to recollection is his critical work, and his position as the editor of the *Anti-Jacobin* and the first series of the *Quarterly*, in which last office this bitter scribbler "put pepper into the quill" with which Mr. Wilson Croker (upon whom Macaulay afterwards executed poetic justice) did all he could to

<sup>1</sup> It is not a bad lesson in literary taste to compare the awful critic's verses with those of the national poet :—

I wish I were where Helen lies,  
Night and day on me she cries ;  
Oh that I were where Helen lies,  
On fair Kirkconnel lee.

I wish I were where Anna lies,  
For I am sick of lingering life  
And every hour Affection cries,  
Go and partake her humble bier.

O Helen ! fair beyond compare !  
I'll mak' a garland o' thy hair,  
Shall twine my heart for evermair  
Until the day I dee.

I wish I could ; for when she died  
I lost my all, and life has proved  
Since that sad hour a dreary void—  
A waste unlovely and unloved.

assassinate poor young Keats. Gifford had begun life very humbly, and his Anna was his housekeeper—an appropriate muse.

It was, however, a much finer hand which wielded the scourge upon the larger names which in that day graced the Poets' Corner of the *Morning Post* and *Chronicle*: and the chastisement thus inflicted has taken a permanent place in literature not accorded to the poetical trifles which called it forth. George Canning is one of the most brilliant names in modern English history. His early life is more like that of one of Lord Beaconsfield's astonishing heroes than of any young aspirant in more veritable records. Born in misery, and brought up for the first dozen years of his life in the shabby discomfort and almost destitution of a poor actor's shifting and uncertain home, he was transported from that dismal life behind the scenes to the genial daylight of Eton and Oxford as by an enchanter's wand. The transformation was no less striking that it was merely a transfer to the position in which he was born, for his father, George Canning, was the disinherited eldest son of an Irish gentleman of property; and poor Mrs. Reddish, the actress, then married for the second time, had been one of the belles of society, though now sunk so low. Canning's brilliant abilities displayed themselves at Eton in the little school journal, the *Microcosm*, which has never in all the generations of school "Chronicles," "Ramblers," etc., been approached again. And the young man did all that a young man ought to do at Oxford, attracted and was attracted by only such companions as were excellent and could help him on in the world, which, alas! is by no means the invariable consequence of university life. When he came up to Lincoln's Inn to study law, his career was, in some respects, exactly the same as that of the young Endymion, the last hero of Lord Beaconsfield. Like him,

he attended the meetings of a debating society, and soon made himself a name in its discussions. But Canning was so far different from Endymion that he had to change his politics before he got into the way of fortune. He had been born and bred a Whig, and as a Whig had been known at Oxford. It is reported by some that a visit from Godwin, asking him to put himself at the head of a revolutionary movement, was the touch which sent the eager young man to the other side; and by others, that Pitt himself, hearing of his great qualities, took pains to have him brought within his own personal influence. A clever young man, or rather a young man of abilities so distinguished, was a prize for either party at a time when so much was going on, and when politics ran so high.

Whether, as in the case of Endymion, the great ladies of society, with soft determination, pushed the young man on, we are not now in a position to tell; but certain it is, that, entering Parliament in his twenty-fourth year, he became an Under Secretary of State when he was twenty-five. It was after he had thus entered the magic circle of power that he took his place in literature, in a way so easy, so mirthful and youthful, yet so effective. France was in those days the prevailing thought in every man's mind. The enthusiasm with which the poetical youth of the time contemplated this great typical country, working out her tragical problem for the enlightenment of the age, has been already referred to; and there was a strong feeling of sympathy and interest in the wider circle of general society everywhere. But after the massacres of September, and the setting up of the guillotine, this sentiment had undergone a great change; and though there was an influential and able party which stood by what they believed to be the cause of freedom, even in spite of Napoleon's first conquests, and which strongly opposed and discountenanced the war into which England had



entered, yet the usual dogged patriotism and determination to be on our own side impelled public opinion the other way. The young minister and recent convert to the dominant creed found a glorious opportunity of distinguishing himself and furnishing his party with that weapon of ridicule which is always so effective in political warfare, at the expense of the new poets, his contemporaries, whose contributions to the Liberal newspapers, even when without absolute political meaning, gave additional popularity and *prestige* to these journals. It is an easy, if by no means an elevated method of criticism, to connect the names of political sympathisers in any great movement with the violent extremes into which it may run; but it is little less than ludicrous now-a-days to see the respectable and virtuous Southey, whose phase of Radicalism was so short-lived, and the dreamy and philosophical Coleridge, credited with a wish to bring in the Guillotine, to set the streets of London running with blood as the streets of Paris had been, and to aid in the dark designs of Buonaparté, as he is always called, the Italian pronunciation of the young General's name not having yet given way to the French. It can scarcely be supposed that Canning and his colleagues believed anything of the kind, but it furnished them with such an occasion at once for frolic and for partisan warfare that they would have been more than mortal had they foregone their advantage. Had there not been a Canning in the camp, with all the zeal of a recent convert, and a schoolboy love of fun to light up the crusade, the *Anti-Jacobin* would have shared the fate of other short-lived political satires. The forced fun of the prospectus was too heavy to attract the reader:—

“ We have not arrived (to our shame, perhaps, we avow it) at that wild and unshackled freedom of thought which rejects all habit, all wisdom of former times, all restraint of ancient usage and of local

attachment, and which judges upon each subject, whether of politics or morals, as it arises, by lights entirely its own, without reference to recognised principle or established practice. We confess, whatever disgrace may attend such a confession, that we have not so far got the better of the influence of long habits and early education, not so far imbibed that spirit of liberal indifference, of diffused and comprehensive philanthropy, which distinguishes the candid character of the present age, but that we have our feelings, our preferences, our affections, attending on particular places, manners, and institutions, and even on particular portions of the human race. It may be thought a narrow and illiberal distinction, but we avow ourselves to be *partial* to the COUNTRY *in which we live*, notwithstanding the daily panegyrics which we read and hear of the superior virtues and endowments of her rival and hostile neighbours. We are prejudiced in favour of *her* establishments, civil and religious, though without claiming for either that ideal perfection which modern philosophy professes to discover in the more luminous subjects that are arising on all sides of us. . . . If, as Philosopher Monge avers in his eloquent and instructive address to the Directory, '*The Government of England and the French Republic cannot exist together*,' we do not hesitate in our choice, though well aware that in that choice we may be liable, in the opinion of many critics of the present day, to the imputation of a want of candour or of discernment. Admirers of military heroism are dazzled by military successes, in common with other men. We are yet, even *here*, conscious of some qualification and distinction in our feelings. We acknowledge ourselves apt to look with more complacency on bravery or skill when displayed in the service of our country, than when we see them directed against its interests or its safety; and however equal the claims to admiration in either case may be, we feel our hearts grow warmer at the recital of what has been achieved by HOWE, by JARVIS, or by DUNCAN, than at '*the glorious victory of Jemappes*,' or '*the immortal battle of the bridge of Lodi*.' In MORALS we are equally old fashioned. We have yet to learn the modern refinement of referring, in all considerations upon human conduct, not to any settled and preconceived principles of right and wrong; not to any general and fundamental rules which experience, and wisdom, and justice, and the common consent of mankind, have established; but to the internal admonition of every man's judgment or conscience in his own particular instance. . . . We have not yet persuaded ourselves to think it a safe or a sound doctrine that every man who can divest himself of a moral error in theory has a right to be with impunity and without disguise a scoundrel in practice. It is not in our creed that ATHEISM

is as good a faith as CHRISTIANITY, provided it be professed with equal sincerity ; nor could we admit it as an excuse for MURDER that the murderer was in his own mind conscientiously persuaded that the murdered might, for many good reasons, be better out of the way. Of all these and the like principles—in one word, of JACOBINISM in all its shapes and all its degrees, political and moral, public and private, whether as it openly threatens the subversion of States, or gradually saps the foundations of domestic happiness, we are the avowed, determined, and irreconcilable enemies.”

This elaborate irony may be new to the reader, who knows little probably about the *Anti-Jacobin* except the delightful mockery of its verses. It is curious to imagine that Englishmen could ever have been supposed to take the part of the national enemy in such a crisis : and whether the lively and brilliant writers of the *Anti-Jacobin* believed their own accusations, it is hard to tell ; but politics were a passion in that age of overthrow, and England had begun to be excited by ideas of invasion, and the blood of the people was getting up. The newspapers of the time, moreover, were strong upon the Liberal side, and many active minds, and a great deal of literary force, seems to have been engaged in the formation of that great power of the daily journals, then a comparatively new institution, and taking advantage of every means possible, even of poetry, to secure its footing. The serious object of Canning’s paper was, according to the prospectus, not only to record events and deliver its opinion upon them, but especially to produce “ a contradiction and confutation of the falsehoods and misrepresentations concerning those events. their causes, and their consequences, which may be found in the papers devoted to the cause of SEDITION and IRRELIGION, to the pay and principles of FRANCE.” The confutation of these “ lies and misrepresentations ” occupies much the greater part of the *Anti-Jacobin* ; but all this has fallen, heavy as a stone, into the waters of oblivion.

That which has survived is of a more ethereal order. It so happened that Southey, always venturesome and rash in metres, had advised himself unwarily to produce, among his weekly tale of verses for his newspaper, some curious experiments in classic measures. They were learned, but they were not happy, and it is to be supposed that either the evident imperfections of them, or the humour of the imitation, scared him in future from this special byway of the poetic paths. Southey's Sapphics were in no way political, but it is easy to see how irresistibly tempting they would be to the malicious young statesman, more learned in Greek measures than Southey himself, and eagerly on the outlook for anything by which he could raise a laugh against his adversaries. It was not difficult to make them out to be an attempt to cause enmity between the rich and the poor, while the opportunity at once for fun and vengeance was not to be passed by. Southey's verses are scarcely worth quoting. They began as follows ;—

“ Cold was the night wind : drifting fast the snows fell ;  
Wide were the downs, and shelterless and naked :  
When a poor wand'rer struggled on her journey  
Weary and way-sore.”

Swiftly upon this unfortunate experiment followed the lightning stroke of satire. There are few poems better known than the “ Needy Knife-Grinder ;” but we believe the majority of readers are ignorant of the object of this masterly mockery—

#### FRIEND OF HUMANITY.

“ Needy Knife-grinder ! whither are you going ?  
Rough is the road, your wheel is out of order—  
Bleak blows the blast ;—your hat has got a hole in't,  
So have your breeches !

“ Weary knife-grinder ! little think the proud ones,  
 Who in their coaches roll along the turnpike-  
 -road, what hard work ’tis crying all day, ‘ Knives and  
 Scissars to grind O !’

“ Tell me, Knife-grinder, how came you to grind knives ?  
 Did some rich man tyrannically use you ?  
 Was it the squire ? or parson of the parish ;  
 Or the attorney ?

“ Was it the squire, for killing of his game ? or  
 Covetous parson, for his tithes distraining ?  
 Or roguish lawyer, made you lose your little  
 All in a lawsuit ?

“ (Have you not read the ‘ Rights of Man,’ by Tom Paine ?)  
 Drops of compassion tremble on my eyelids,  
 Ready to fall, as soon as you have told your  
 Pitiful story.”

#### KNIFE-GRINDER.

“ Story ! God bless you ! I have none to tell, sir,  
 Only last night a-drinking at the Chequers,  
 This poor old hat and breeches, as you see, were  
 Torn in a scuffle.

“ Constables came up for to take me into  
 Custody ; they took me before the justice ;  
 Justice Oldmixon put me in the parish-  
 -stocks for a vagrant.

“ I should be glad to drink your Honour’s health in  
 A pot of beer, if you will give me sixpence ;  
 But for my part, I never love to meddle  
 With politics, sir.”

#### FRIEND OF HUMANITY.

“ I give thee sixpence ! I will see thee damn’d first—  
 Wretch ! whom no sense of wrongs can rouse to vengeance ;  
 Sordid, unfeeling, reprobate, degraded,  
 Spiritless outcast !”

*Kicks the knife-grinder, overturns his wheel, and exit in a  
 transport of republican enthusiasm and universal philanthropy.*

Equally clever, and full of ludicrous suggestions which have clung to the popular mind ever since, is the drama of the "Rovers" in which the new Teutonic inspiration which was beginning to move the world, the "Robbers" of Schiller, the plays of Lessing, and—a long way behind these—the dramas of Kotzebue—were satirised. The wonderful lyric in praise of "sweet Matilda Pottingen" is almost as well known as the "Knife-Grinder;" and the sudden resolution of the two ladies in the "Rovers," meeting for the first time in their lives, to "swear eternal friendship" is quoted every day by many people who have no notion where it comes from. These verses have kept the *Anti-Jacobin* alive. The serious part of it lost all possibility of living when the Revolution scare passed away from the public mind, and England no longer feared her own harmless and deeply disappointed visionaries.

Canning's coadjutor in this work, as in the *Eton* journal, was John Hookham Frere, the son of a Suffolk family of long-established gentry, with ancestors both learned and remarkable, and all the advantages an English gentleman with good connections, wealth, and reputation could desire. He belonged to the highest class of social life, and lived among statesmen and diplomatists from the beginning of his days—a circumstance which, by some curious law of compensation, makes the record of his life far more commonplace than if he had been a poor lad on the roadside of existence, or a Blue-coat boy about the London streets. Perhaps, however, had they been born on the less exalted level, Hookham Frere would never have developed into anything higher than a witty citizen, or Canning been much greater than a brilliant Deputy or Common Council man. The lives which are swallowed up in political movement, with nothing but scanty glimpses of society to make up for

their lack of human interest, are sadly flat in the recounting. Frere was so closely connected with his still more distinguished friend, that even the "Knife-Grinder" is presented indifferently in the collections of both their works, and nobody now can tell which lines came from one pen and which from the other. His chief independent production was the satirical poem known as "Whistlecraft," in the lively and vigorous metre afterwards adopted and made popular by Byron in "Don Juan" and "Beppo," for which, indeed, Byron owed some obligation to Frere, though he afterwards preferred to describe himself as taking his inspiration from the Italian of Pulci. Frere, no doubt, found his model there; and his poem in many parts reads like the livelier and lighter portions of "Don Juan." Another piece of work for which his reputation is still high among scholars is his translation of the "Birds" and "Acharnians" of Aristophanes, one of the few translations which are said to render the spirit and life of the original. He was the holder of various diplomatic offices, and lived at Malta during the later part of his life, the friend of all distinguished persons whom Providence wafted that way.

Canning's fame is too great, and his historical position too important, to permit him to linger here, in the stiller regions of the literary world. The sudden smiling onslaught of the young statesman, fresh from the academical career which he had passed through so brilliantly, and still new to the larger sphere that had received him so early, is as interesting as it is daring and effective. We feel like spectators in a crowd when an unforeseen accident happens, and the throng closes round to see what the wonder is. It is as if in an ordinary game some agile young prince should spring in and take the bat for an innings, and send the ball high over everybody's head in a long-celebrated hit, hereafter to be talked of among

the traditions of the gods. Such was Canning's appearance in our world of letters. It was the best of jokes, the most delightful, ready, and telling stroke which a chance combatant ever made. But he had no time to linger upon it or repeat it, which was all the better for its fame.

A few years after the short-lived *Anti-Jacobin*, which lasted only about six months, had run its little course in London, the first great periodical organ of criticism had its beginning in the North. In the opening years of the century, a group of lively and able young men, with superabundant talent and spirit, and not half enough to do, had gathered together in a cheerful little society in Edinburgh. They were chiefly young lawyers, with some young "foreigners"—so described by Lord Cockburn—Englishmen whose presence in the Scotch capital was more remarkable, though, at the same time, in this particular way more usual than at the present time: for we do not think it at all a common thing now-a-days that scions of English aristocracy should be found pursuing their studies in a Scotch university. The young advocates were all of liberal opinions, and consequently out of favour in the courts. They were shut out from hopes of advancement, from all the Sheriffships and official posts which kept the Scotch bar in vigour. Lord Cockburn, their historian, points out that this exclusion was not without its compensating privilege. "It gave them leisure," he says, which, unfortunately, is an advantage possessed by young barristers everywhere, without, we fear, very much good resulting either to themselves or any one else. "Being all branded with the same mark, and put under the same ban, they were separated into a set of their own, within which there was mirth and friendship, study and hope, ambitions and visions. There was a particular place at the north end of the Outer



House which was the known haunt of these doomed youths; and there did they lounge, session after session, and year after year, employed sufficiently now and then by a friendly agent to show what was in them; but never enough to make them feel that they were engaged in a fair professional competition; reconciled, however, to their fate, and not at all depressed by their bad character." Among these young Scots were two Englishmen, one (Lord Webb Seymour) a spectator rather than a member of the band, the other, one of the most lively and energetic of the group, a young clergyman, full of wit, which often verged upon the profane, and never at a loss for a happy gibe or humorous mystification. He it was who described the brotherhood as "cultivating literature on a little oatmeal," a witty rendering of a well-known description. They were none of them rich, but they were all young, and held in constant activity by the lively fire which burned in their bosoms of opposition to all the old-world authorities who kept them down, but over whom they were born to triumph. After the day of weary attendance upon fortune, pacing up and down that historical pavement of the Parliament House, they met round the supper-table they loved, in some high story of an Edinburgh house, where, near the skies, they could look out on one side over the Firth, or on the other watch the magical lights upon the crest of the old town, and Arthur's Seat in shadowy grandeur behind. It was not possible that so much vigour and vitality should remain without some kind of utterance.

Edinburgh was five or six times as far from London in those days as it is now, and though independent in opinion, was sadly wanting in opportunities of giving that opinion expression. Two or three trifling newspapers and an insignificant magazine were all the means of utterance possessed by a highly intellectual society, and a

school of learning and science sufficiently distinguished to call students to it from the most unlikely regions. Nothing could be more natural than that these vigorous and able young men, to whom, in their own profession, employment was so scanty, should have turned to literature as the readiest expedient by which they could find footing in life, and say their say upon matters which were to them of the profoundest interest. To all appearance literature, as a task to live by, had not occurred to them at the outset; but they chafed at their inaction and to feel how little power they had of influencing the world. One stormy spring night the brotherhood was assembled in Jeffrey's little house in Buccleuch Place, on what Sydney Smith describes, with his usual amusing exaggeration, as "the eighth or ninth story," when the smouldering projects came to a final head. "I proposed that we should set up a Review," says Sydney Smith; "this was acceded to with acclamation." They talked it over seriously, yet with much of the malicious delight of a band of schoolboys planning a mystification. The wind was high among the roofs in that home of the winds, and as they listened to it, shaking the doors and windows, there was much "merriment at the greater storm they were about to raise." None of them were old enough to be indifferent to this. The delight of rousing all the echoes, of aiming here and there a blow that would make their adversaries tingle, was warm in their minds. Francis Jeffrey, who was the future head of the band, "the Arch-critic" as he was called by some of his friends,—Judge Jeffrey, as his victims entitled him in rueful reference to a still more reckless slayer,—was a vivacious, brilliant, and indomitable spirit, lodged in one of the most insignificant of bodily forms. He had already begun to write before this momentous resolution was taken, and was, we think, the only one among them of

any literary experience. By his side was Henry Brougham, a lank and sinewy Borderer, with the protuberant nose of genius, and an ambition which was boundless, the future Lord Chancellor of England, one of the most restless, busy, and important figures of his time; and Sydney Smith, a very unclerical clergyman, yet withal no bad representative of the easy-going English parson of the time, with an honest idea of duty, but no particular delicacy about his profession or devotion to it. These were the three most fully identified with the work. Many others appear and disappear across the scene, the gentle Horner, Grahame of the "Sabbath," a mild and tender soul, much more clerical than his fellow priest. Allen, afterwards the medical officer and ministrant of all the social wits at Holland House, and many more: but these three appear always in the front of the group: Jeffrey, rapid and eager, flying on ahead, throwing his spear here and there out of frolic if for nothing else; Brougham bringing down the whole strength of his arm with a more determined meaning; and Sydney Smith smiling over his victims, as he played with them, and gently probed them with his pen. He was the editor, in some sort, of the new Review, at least of the first number—and is said to have written *scores* of the articles in this first number with his own hand. It must be added, however, that these articles were very different, in point of length, from those afterwards adopted. There were twenty-three in the first number, some of them not more than brief critical notices.

This new organ of literary life made its first appearance in October 1802. It was the beginning of the great and popular school of periodical writing. It brought after it the first important modern magazine, that of Blackwood, and all that since have followed in their train.

"The effect (says Lord Cockburn) was electrical. It is impossible for those who did not live at the time and in the heart of the scene to feel, or almost to understand, the impression made by the new luminary, or the anxiety with which its motions were observed. It was an entire and instant change of everything that the public had been used to in that sort of composition. . . . The learning of the new journal, its talent, its spirit, its writing, and its independence, were all new ; and the surprise was increased by a work so full of public life springing up suddenly in a remote part of the kingdom. . . . Many thoughtful men, indifferent of party, but anxious for the progress of the human mind, and alarmed lest war and political confusion should restore a new course of dark ages, were cheered by the unexpected appearance of what seemed likely to prove a great depository for the contributions of able men to the cause of philosophy. . . . The splendid career of the journal as it was actually seen was not anticipated either by its authors or by its most ardent admirers, none of whom could foresee its long endurance, or the extent to which the mighty improvements that have reformed our opinions and institutions, and enabled us to engraft the wisdom of experience on the maintainable antiquities of our system, were to depend on this single publication. They only saw the present establishment of a vigour of the highest order for the able and fearless discussion of every matter worthy of being inquired into ; but they could not yet discern the consequences."

Mrs. Fletcher, whose reminiscences of Edinburgh life have been published within the last few years, and give a pleasant aid to our comprehension of the period, adds a pretty anecdote which shows the first effect of the publication and the feeling excited by it. She was the wife of an excellent and able man, one of the despised Whig party, whose character and talents had, however, pushed him forward, out of the cold shade, into a considerable practice at the bar, and whose powers of discrimination rose in this case to absolute divination, *i.e.* the luckiest of guesses.

"The authorship of the different articles was discussed at every dinner-table, and I recollect an occurrence at one house which must have belonged to this year. Mr. Fletcher, though not himself given to scientific inquiry or interests, had been so much struck with the

logical and general ability displayed in an article of the young Review on Professor Black's chemistry, that in the midst of a few guests, of whom Henry Brougham was one, he expressed an opinion (while in utter ignorance as to the authorship) to the effect that the man who wrote that article might do or be anything he pleased. Mr. Brougham, who was seated near me at the table, stretched eagerly forward and said : ' What, Mr. Fletcher, be anything ? May he be Lord Chancellor ? ' On which my husband repeated his words with emphasis, ' Yes, Lord Chancellor or anything he desires. ' "

The publication which produced so much excitement, and which we have all been taught to look back to not only as one of the most brilliant beginnings of literature, but as the most scathing and severe of literary censors, will scarcely carry out its reputation to the reader who casts his eyes upon it, looking backward now over nearly eighty years of periodical literature. The review of Thalaba, which was the first of the many attacks made upon the new school of poets, does not strike us with any feeling either of undue severity or brilliant malice. Though Jeffrey opposed the supposed Lake poets strenuously and with all his might, he does not rush at them with the war-cry of polemical rage, or the glitter of mingled fun and wrath in his eyes, which is the true inspiration of a "slashing article." The *Saturday Review*, at its institution, could in this respect have taught many lessons to those critics of the early century whose victims groaned so loudly, and who flattered themselves on such a trenchant use of the knife. The most striking particular in the special criticism to which we have referred is its respectful devotion to the old models. Jeffrey and all his brotherhood were actually suffering for their liberal opinions : the ignorant were prejudiced against them, and even the sensible influenced by an idea that their politics were such as to afford an opening for similar excesses to those of France. That their sympathies were

all with the revolutionary party, nobody would have doubted. Mrs. Fletcher, whom we have just quoted, whose husband, though an older man, was of precisely the same class and party, was suspected on her first coming to Edinburgh of having in her possession a small guillotine with which she cut off the heads of the fowls prepared for dinner, and experimented on rats and mice in preparation for the time when "French principles" should have got the upper hand. "This popular belief reached" (says her daughter) "our father's amazed and amused ears by the question asked him in sad earnest by a kindly old Highland clergyman, whether it was possible that a lady he so much respected could be so 'awfully misled'?" These were the principles with which our young writers were also credited—but though the whole excited, half tremulous, half delighted society, looking for something bad enough and violent enough to thrill them through and through, did somehow manage to secure the thing they looked for, it is amazing to see how little produced it. So far as literature was concerned, this dashing, daring band, making its raid like a Scotch Ishmael upon all established authorities, was on every point of literary tradition as steady as the *Anti-Jacobin* itself, and not more liberal. "Poetry has this much in common with religion," says Jeffrey, "that its standards were fixed long ago by certain inspired writers, whose authority it is no longer lawful to call in question." It would have been very much in consonance with the supposed principles of the writer if this beginning had led to a daring renunciation of any such allegiance to the past: but nothing of the kind follows. It is well known that the most liberal politics by no means involve liberality in religious questions; but in matters of literature, the mere existence of a new school of poetry professing to have "broken loose from the bondage of ancient authority and reasserted

the independence of genius" would, one might have thought, have secured the sympathy of young men whose determination was to "break the bondage of antient authority" in matters of government, and to "reassert the independence" of all the faculties and opinions. But it was not so. The chief charge brought by the revolutionary Review against the new school of poetry is this: that it is "a system that would teach us to undervalue that vigilance and labour which sustained the loftiness of Milton, and gave energy and direction to the pointed and fine propriety of Pope."

We cannot, indeed, find in the first Review any trace either of extreme opinion, or of that audacious force of expression which so often distinguishes the youthful writer. The criticisms are more judicious than brilliant. In the first half-dozen numbers there are scarcely as many articles marked by any special severity. The three writers who suffer most are all poets, but the verdict in each case has been confirmed more or less by posterity. Charles Lamb's tragedy of "John Woodvil" was condemned alike by friends and foes. Coleridge, whose friendship for the author gives the reviewer occasion for a fling of special sharpness at the end of his paper, was as little pleased with it as Jeffrey could be, and earnestly opposed its publication; and nobody now remembers or cares to remember that our delightful Elia, most lovable and tender of his contemporaries, once attempted to put on the "learned sock." Joanna Baillie's tragedies, which were likewise demolished with great fervour, have secured much respect for their author, but have sunk into practical oblivion, leaving her with a name which no one contests, because nobody is acquainted with the foundation for it. Moore's translation of "Anacreon," which was the third book assailed, is one in defence of which few now would care to take up the critic's glove. The strictures are

severe in these cases, but not cruel, and it is difficult to understand upon what the bitter resentment of so many of the lettered class was founded. Another surprising particular which strikes the reader is the numerous criticisms of French books in these early numbers, and the extremely judicious and moderate way in which the questions of recent French history are treated. Though the fever was scarcely subsiding in the veins of the public, which had swept through everybody's pulses so short a time before, it is with the most perfect reasonableness and composure that Jeffrey treated the great question of the origin of revolution in France in the very beginning of the new periodical. It would scarcely be possible to take up the subject more soberly in the present day

Nevertheless, whether it was that the sudden plunge of the little brotherhood of the North into this supposed crusade of criticism affected the imagination of the public, or that a certain amount of alarm and amusement was called forth by this sudden lifting up of a standard in so unexpected a quarter, there can be no doubt of the real effect produced. The latter argument, no doubt, told for something. A local reputation is a wonderful support to every new beginner, and though the influential circles in Edinburgh did not agree with or approve the Whig band, they still showed a national pride in the new undertaking, which was the most popular as well as by far the most ambitious literary undertaking in existence. The establishment of a High Court of Judicature in Edinburgh, before which all English writers should be capable of being arraigned, was a matter of pleasure and self-satisfaction to the most Tory judge on the bench, as well as to the fiery young politicians who conducted the enterprise. The fact of being the smaller and poorer in a copartnership, the least considerable member of a union, has almost invariably this effect; and it has been emi-



nently the case in Scotland that the pleasure of rivalling, or even, as she has hoped, surpassing, her stronger partner, has always elated her, whether the success was achieved in the way most congenial to her traditions or not. And it is scarcely possible to avoid remarking the natural converse of this feeling in the sentiment of the writers assailed, whose proverbial objection to criticism was embittered by the unexpected quarter from which it came, and who looked upon their assailants on the other side of the Tweed with an annoyed and jealous dislike, and something of that angry surprise with which the sudden onslaught, and what is more, victory, of a stripling, of whom nobody was afraid, might be regarded by his seniors and superiors.

Of these sulky and alarmed spectators Southey is the best spokesman. "The *Edinburgh Review* will not keep its ground," he says. "It consists of pamphlets instead of critical accounts." "Of Judge Jeffrey, of the *Edinburgh Review*, I must ever think and speak as of a bad politician, a worse moralist, and a critic in matters of taste equally incompetent and unjust." In another place, the most courteous and amiable of poets speaks of "a Scotch scoundrel calculating how to make the most per sheet with the least amount of labour." When he visited Edinburgh in 1805, his verdict both upon his special critic and the society in general was of the most contemptuous kind, though always with a snarl of alarmed rage in it. "Scotch society disappointed me," he says, "as it must do a man who loves conversation instead of discussion. Of the three faculties of the mind, they seem exclusively to prefer judgment. They have nothing to teach and a great deal more to learn than I should care to be at the trouble of instructing them in." Jeffrey had written a review of Southey's last poem, "Madoc," at the period of this visit, but the article had not been published.

He had the courtesy and fine feeling on being invited to meet Southey to send it to him, that the poet might judge whether he would consent to make his acquaintance. "He is too much a man of the world, I believe, in spite of his poesy," says Jeffrey, "to decline seeing me after this, whatever he may think of the critic." Southey's report of the meeting is neither so dignified, nor does it make any return of generosity for this manly frankness. "I met him in good humour, being, by God's blessing, of a happy temper," Southey writes. "Having seen him, it would be impossible to be angry at anything so diminutive. We talked upon the question of taste, on which we were at issue. He is a mere child on that subject. I never met with a man whom it was so easy to checkmate." The uneasy superiority of this deliverance is one of those pettinesses which it grieves us to see a good man give way to. Wordsworth's tone, in speaking on the same subject, has the addition of his usual solemnity. "The writers in these publications," he says, "while they prosecute their inglorious employment, cannot be supposed to be in a state of mind very favourable for being affected by the finer influences of a thing so pure as genuine poetry; and as to this instance . . . though I have not seen it, I doubt not but that it is a splenetic effusion of the conductor of that Review, who has taken a perpetual retainer from his own incapacity to plead against my claims to public approbation." Perhaps it is because we are more used to criticism now-a-days, but we should not think it either dignified or decorous, whatever our private sentiments might be, to speak of our literary judges in this way. The complaint is still more out of place when the poet, like Wordsworth, professes to appeal not to the general reader, but to those specially qualified to understand. "I hope," he says of the 'White Doe,' "that it will be acceptable to the intelligent, *for whom alone it was written.*" To speak of

the "inglorious occupation" of reviewing, the trade by which Southey got his bread, as incapacitating men for "the higher influences of poetry," was singularly unfortunate.

But though the *Edinburgh Review* shows to us, looking back upon it, no character of special truculence, nothing worse than we find and support with equanimity in much less important publications now-a-days, yet it raised such commotions as no other critical journal has ever raised, and held such a place during its early years as has never been paralleled. A man might well be proud, whose foot, as it touched the ground, exploded such a brilliant and furious firework as the *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, to which we must refer farther on. The touch of spiteful and contemptuous rage, in that the reviewers were *Scotch*, is one of the most curious signs of the tenacity of national sentiment. We are by no means sure that it is not in existence still.

On the other hand, the admiration of the Edinburgh circles was boundless. Mrs. Grant of Laggan, one of the most agreeable of social chroniclers, and herself a writer of some reputation, speaks of her "Arch-critic" with an enthusiasm at which probably he would have been the first to laugh. She neither approved the politics nor the metaphysics of the new periodical, but wishes that Jeffrey's "precious little essays" might be separated from the mass and bound up together. "Was there ever such a creature as Jeffrey?" she adds; "his fertility of mind, and the ease and felicity with which he clothes original and powerful thoughts in terms the most graceful and expressive, never appeared more than in his last criticism on that splendid writer, Lord Byron." Here we touch upon another chapter in the great and varied tale: but before Byron's day of vengeance Jeffrey had all but fought a duel with Moore, in consequence of an adverse article.

It is almost impossible to refrain from a laugh at the idea of a poet and his critic thus meeting "upon the field of honour;" and the tendency is, we fear, exaggerated by a recollection quite unworthy historical gravity, of the very small size of both the would-be combatants.

Jeffrey soon settled into the permanent editor of the *Review*, and its representative in every way. His colleagues nearly all dispersed within a few years, and though they continued to contribute from a distance, his was always the leading and shaping influence, the centre of its activity and reputation. Though he had a great power of wounding, and used it boldly, it cannot be said of Jeffrey that he was in any respect an ungenerous critic. Even in his unsparing condemnation of the "Lake School," and the curious literary conservatism which he united to his Liberal politics, he did a certain justice to the very objects of his castigation, finding beauty in "Thalaba," and power in the "Excursion," even though he proclaimed of the latter that "This will never do." He was wrong sometimes, no doubt, like other men; but while Southey was right in his exclamation, "Crush the 'Excursion!'" he might as well think of crushing Skiddaw," he was absurdly wrong in his estimate of Jeffrey's character, as was Wordsworth, when he said that in such an "inglorious occupation" no susceptibility to pure poetry was to be looked for. They were too near each other to be able to perceive each other's proportions and weigh their respective powers.

We cannot refrain from referring here to the sketch of Jeffrey published in the *Reminiscences* of Thomas Carlyle, which have been given to the world since the greater part of this chapter was written. It is, we think, the most real and characteristic portrait in that painful book, and in many points touched with masterly lightness and truth. Gloomily meditating on his own as yet unre-

vealed career, and wondering whether fate was ever to bring him to anything better than the chaos of perturbed genius and doubt and care, in which he was dwelling, Carlyle found a sort of opening into daylight and cheerfulness in his first encounter with the great critic. Going to his house with an introduction from one of the friends whom he had made in London, Barry Cornwall (so called), the poet, the big Annandale man with his shaggy locks and gleaming eyes, as ready to take offence as any man in Britain, found himself suddenly charmed and soothed by the genuineness, warmth, and friendliness with which he was received.

"Five pair of candles were cheerfully burning, in the light of which sat my famous little gentleman : laid aside his work, cheerfully invited me to sit, and began talking in a perfectly human manner. Our dialogue was perfectly human and successful : lasted for perhaps twenty minutes (for I could not consume a great man's time) ; turned upon the usual topics—what I was doing, what I had published, 'German Romance' translations my last thing, to which, I remember, he said kindly, 'We must give you a lift ;' an offer which, in some complimentary way, I managed to his satisfaction to decline. My feeling with him was that of unembarrassment : a reasonable, veracious little man, I could perceive, with whom any truth one felt good to utter would have a fair chance."

This interview was followed by the appearance in the very next *Edinburgh Review* of "A little paper on Jean Paul," which was Carlyle's real introduction to the lists of literature, and showed such ready insight and prompt action on the part of the critic as might atone for many of his literary sins. "Jeffrey was by no means the supreme in criticism, or in anything else : but it is certain there has no critic appeared among us since who was worth naming beside him," adds the same incorruptible and never too gentle witness. "He was not deep enough, pious or reverent enough to have been great in literature : but he was a man intrinsically of veracity : said nothing

without meaning it to some considerable degree ; had the quickest perceptions ; excellent practical discernment of what lay before him." The following little picture, cut as with a diamond, of his person and appearance cannot but light up any page on which it is quoted :—

"I honestly admired him ; . . . was always glad to notice him when I strolled into the courts, and eagerly enough stepped up to hear him if I found him pleading : a delicate, attractive, dainty, little figure, as he merely walked about, much more if he were speaking : uncommonly bright black eyes, instinct with vivacity, intelligence, and kindly fire : roundish brow, delicate oval face, full of rapid expression ; figure light, nimble, though so small. He had his gown, almost never any wig, wore his black hair closely cropped. I have seen the back part of it suddenly jerk out in some of the rapid expressions of his face, and knew, even if behind him, that his brow was then puckered, and his eyes looking archly, half contemptuously out in conformity to some conclusive little cut his tongue was giving. His voice, clear, harmonious, and sonorous, had something of metallic in it, something almost plangent : never rose into alt, into any dissonance or shrillness, nor carried much the character of humour, though a fine feeling of the ludicrous always dwelt in him —as you could notice best when he got into Scotch dialect, and gave you, with admirable truth of mimicry, old Edinburgh incidents and experiences of his."

Long years after this, if the writer may be permitted a personal note, when she had put forth into the world, in all the inexperience of extreme youth, a modest little novel, this great critic and prince in literature took the trouble to write to the unknown novice, of whose very name he was ignorant, a letter full of the most delicate criticism and fatherly commendation. This was only a few weeks before his death, and the hand was already tremulous with weakness which bade the new-comer welcome.

Such was the man of whom it must be allowed that he created a new power in literature, howsoever we may rate for good or evil his exercise of it. A curious volume lately published, containing the correspondence of Mr.

Macvey Napier, has thrown a strange and amusing light upon the art of editing, as employed upon this same *Edinburgh Review* in its later stages. Amusing, however, as it may be to the reader, it must have had a very different effect upon the harassed and anxious head of the band, with so many different minds to keep in harmony. All this Jeffrey bore "lightly as a flower," with unflinching vivacity, and that readiness to throw himself into the middle of the fray, and make up all deficiencies, which is so essential to the leaders of periodical literature. And it must be remembered that the enterprise was new, in every sense of the word, an experiment in "the trade" as well as in letters. The group of friends met, with a certain secrecy, "in a dingy room off Willison's printing-office, in Craig's Close," to read over the proofs of their articles, with mutual criticism, and no doubt a great deal of that mutual admiration which keeps such groups together. "Smith was by far the most timid of the confederacy, and believed that unless our *incognito* was strictly maintained, we could not go on a day. And this was his object in making us hold our dark divans at Willison's office, to which he insisted on our repairing singly, and by back approaches or by different lanes!" This was a remnant of the old belief in the *genus irritabile*, the old canons of revenge for criticism, which the *Edinburgh* was the instrument of finally destroying, by making criticism an institution in the literary world: but it is curious to identify so outspoken, and apparently fearless a nature as that of Sydney Smith, an Englishman *par excellence*, as the originator of these mysterious precautions. Thus obstinate anonymity, also, made it difficult for all but the inner circle to discover who was the author of a more than usually brilliant and telling article, and thus was supposed to add to the interest of the public. The principle lingers still in some regions, and specially

in the only great literary organ which still has its headquarters in Edinburgh. In our own days, a different canon has begun to be supreme; but we cannot help reverting with approval to the earlier idea. It is true that in the chief circles of literature there is never any great uncertainty as to whose is the hand that administers chastisement, but we believe that criticism is always most free, both for praise or blame, when it is anonymous, and that the verdict of an important publication, whether it be review as in those days, or newspaper as in our own, is more telling as well as more dignified than that of an individual, whose opinion, in nine cases out of ten, becomes of inferior importance to us the moment we are acquainted with his name.

But it is very curious and amusing to call up before us this scene, so oddly at variance with all the aims and objects of the innocent conspiracy, yet so entirely in keeping with external circumstances. We might search all Europe through, without finding so fit a background for the meeting of a band of secret plotters. The dark and stately street, dimly lighted with the picturesque twinkle of smoky lamps; a blue lane of wintry sky above, broken by all the lofty gables and turrets half as high as heaven; and far down below, amid all the confused crowd of life, now and then a furtive figure, little Jeffrey, light and rapid, skimming along the pavement, young Brougham with lanky limbs and nose in the air, and Smith, plump and pleasant, he of all the rest the least congenial to the scene. To see them dive and disappear into the dark entry "by different approaches," though perhaps they had strolled out of the Parliament House arm in arm ten minutes before, must have been as odd a sight as any that curious age presented. The other scene in which the new editor appeared about the same time, the drill-meetings of the Edinburgh volunteer bands, labouring enthu-



siastically by the smoky lamplight after the work of the day was over at their manual exercise, with this same little Jeffrey among the most awkward of the awkward squad—is not more ludicrously unlike the entire tendency of his life and work. When the conspirators of the *Review* arrived at “the dingy room” in which their pernicious plots were to be discussed, a remnant of boyish frolic and amusement in the masquerading tempered their sense of its absurdity ; but, indeed, to behold the high-coloured resentments, and to hear the pathetic complaints, of the literary classes generally, out of Edinburgh, it would be natural to imagine that this group of young men, in their official white ties, were really executioners of the most bloody and unscrupulous kind.

There was, however, something more than a romance of literature in the new undertaking. “The three first numbers were *given* to the publisher,” says Lord Jeffrey, “he taking the risk and defraying the charges.” “For the first two or three numbers,” Lord Cockburn adds, “they had an idea that such a work could be carried on without remunerating the writers at all. It was to be all gentlemen and no pay.” This, however, was soon perceived to be an impossible notion, since the work of the *Review* inevitably took up more of the time of the contributors than they could afford, after the first outburst of zeal and excitement, to give. The principle of the new publication had been to keep it “quite independent of the booksellers,” a literary, and not a “trade” undertaking ; and hitherto no publisher had been found with a sufficiently elevated idea of literature, or sense of the transformations going on in it, to make such an attempt practicable. Now, however, as usually happens at a great crisis, a man was found to answer the requirements of the time. “Mr. Constable,” says Lord Cockburn, “though unfortunate in the end, was the most

spirited bookseller that had ever appeared in Scotland. . . . Till he appeared, our publishing trade was at nearly the lowest ebb, partly because there was neither population nor independence to produce, or to require, a vigorous publisher. . . . He rushed out and took possession of the open field, as if he had been aware from the first of the existence of the latent spirits which a skilful conjuror might call from the depths of the population to the exercise of literature." When the first few numbers of the *Review* had been published, with a success which, no doubt, had much influence in opening the eyes of this intelligent bookseller to the advantages of making such a profitable undertaking permanent, he consulted Sydney Smith as to the terms on which that could be secured. Smith's advice, that ten guineas a sheet should be paid to the contributors, and two hundred a year to the editor, seems to us a very moderate estimate. But these terms were pronounced by Mr. Longman, who shared the risk, to be "without precedent." The difference between literary remuneration such as this, and the present rate, is, we may believe with gratitude, in no small degree the work of the *Edinburgh Review* and the standard it established.

The position of editor was offered to Jeffrey, evidently the person best qualified for its duties. Sydney Smith had taken a sort of responsibility for the first number, and the others had apparently edited themselves in the conspirators' chamber in Craig's Close, where, no doubt, by this time Jeffrey's alert and vivacious intellect had already shown its harmonising power. But it is curious to see how he balances the question whether he ought or ought not to accept the appointment with a fear of doing something beneath his dignity by accepting pay for his literary services, which is very bewildering. "I will confess," he says, writing to Horner in London, "that I

am disposed to accept it. . . . £300 is a monstrous bribe to a man in my position. . . . It will be long before I make £300 more than I do now by my profession, and by far the greater part of the employment I have will remain with me, I know, in spite of anything of this sort. . . . But what influences me the most is that I engaged in it at first gratuitously along with a set of men whose character and situation in life must command the respect of the multitude, and that I hope to go on with it as a matter of emolument along with the same associates. All the members will take their ten guineas, I find, and under the sanction of that example I think I may take my editor's salary also, without being supposed to have suffered any degradation. . . . I would undoubtedly prefer making the same sum by my profession, but I really want the money, and think that I may take it in this way without compromising either my honour or my future interest. Tell me fairly what you think of it." These scruples strike us as extraordinarily unlikely to affect any man, even of the most susceptible delicacy, now-a-days. The letter ends, however, with an entreaty to Horner, who was evidently very remiss about his own contributions, and kept the authorities of the new *Review* in constant trouble, to "enquire and look about among the literary men and professed writers of the metropolis, and send us down a list of a few that you think worth ten guineas a sheet, and that will work conscientiously for the money." Thus, though there were still hesitations as to putting off the gentleman amateur, and executing literary work for money, the position seems to have gradually settled itself. We may add, before leaving this important literary incident, Jeffrey's own list of contributors, furnished to his brother in America :—

"I do not think you know any of my associates. There is the sage Horner, however, whom you have seen, and who has gone to the English bar with the resolution of being Lord Chancellor; Brougham, a great mathematician, who has just published a book upon the Colonial Policy of Europe, which all you Americans should read; Rev. Sydney Smith and P. Elmsley, two learned Oxonian priests, full of jokes and erudition; my excellent little Sanskrit Hamilton; Thomas Thomson and John Murray, two ingenious advocates; and some dozen of occasional contributors, among whom the most illustrious, I think, are young Watt of Birmingham, and Davy of the Royal Institution. We sell 2500 copies already, and hope to do double in six months, if we are puffed enough."

Among these contributors appeared also, and so early as the fifth number, a lame young advocate, on the sunnier side of the Parliament House and political favour, already Sheriff-Depute of Selkirkshire, and the author of some collections and translations of poetry—decidedly one of the rising men of his day, though in no greater or more perceptible degree than many of the others round him—to wit, Walter Scott, of whom in another place there is a great deal more to be said. His first contribution was a review of Southey's translation of "Amadis of Gaul," a subject most congenial to a mind so eagerly bent upon rediscovering the forgotten glories of the past, and to which mediæval romance was the dearest of all studies. His contributions were but few, and his support was withdrawn when his own party established its separate organ some time after. But he seems always to have maintained kind relations with his fellow townsmen and schoolfellows. He was engaged at the time in collecting materials for his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, the first work (with the exception of several translations from the German) in which he had appeared before the public. It was received with much commendation by Jeffrey in the second number of the *Review*.

When the *Edinburgh* had sailed on in full empire over the changeable atmosphere of public opinion for half-a-dozen years, a rival arose to disturb its undisputed sway. Its only competitors hitherto had been the comparatively trifling little "Monthly Reviews" and "Critical Reviews," which once made the bosoms of authors flutter, but which had fallen into insignificance, though Southey and William Taylor, and many other respectable writers, did what they could, with next to no pay and very little encouragement, to keep them up. The fresh and unhackneyed band of non-professional writers in Edinburgh, with no flavour of Grub Street about them, and almost haughtily independent of the "booksellers," had taken at once a position very much above these old organs. None of them could hold their own against this robust innovator from the North. But it was not till six years after the vigorous birth of the *Edinburgh* that the other party in politics set up their rival review, the *Quarterly*. It was not without misgivings that Jeffrey contemplated this rival; perhaps, also, with a little remorseful consciousness that he had himself gone a little too far in politics and provoked it. "Tell me what you hear and what you think of this new *Quarterly*," he writes to Horner; "and do not let yourself imagine that I feel any unworthy jealousy, and still less any unworthy fear, on the occasion. . . . I do rejoice at the prospect of this kind of literature, which seems to be more and more attended to than any other, being generally improved in quality, and shall be proud to have set an example." As it happened, the rivalry quickened the strain of intellect in both publications, and the public demand for this species of literature, which had been almost created by the first review, was now sufficiently widened to support two. It took away Scott from the Liberal fraternity, to which he had belonged more or less, notwithstanding his

different politics, and it naturally made a great difference in the position of the hitherto unique Review: but the beginning of the *Quarterly* was attended by none of the romance which distinguished the other. It was not a raid of inexperienced and unremunerated champions like the big literary frolic which had grown into so serious a business; but, on the contrary, was a straightforward literary enterprise from the beginning, to support certain views and fill a definite place. The interest must always remain with those who leaped into the arena first, and ventured so much upon an untried principle. The *Quarterly* began with several distinguished contributors, among whom was Southey. The brilliant and caustic intellect of Lockhart soon became its guiding influence; but it was first committed into the hands of a critic of the old school, a man without either the Liberal breeding or larger spirit which became such an enterprise—Gifford of the "Baviad" and "Mæviad," already referred to, who had manipulated the *Anti-Jacobin*, and who was the complete impersonation of a literary hack, ready for any job that might turn up. We may add, to show the difference between the management of this somewhat spiteful and petty personage, so long as it lasted, and the fine instincts of Jeffrey, Charles Lamb's pathetic account of the misfortune that befell him in the new review. He had been entrusted by Southey's mediation with Wordsworth's new poem to review. It had been, as everybody then thought, cruelly treated by Jeffrey, the critic whose "inglorious occupation" made him incapable of appreciating anything so pure as such poetry, according to Wordsworth's own deliverance. Naturally his friend Lamb was eager to do his best for the poet to whom he and all his brotherhood looked up with generous respect and admiration. On his own account, too, Lamb was excited about the article. "It is the first review I ever

did," he writes, nervous but pleased with himself and his production. When, however, the Review appeared with his paper in it, he thus writes to Wordsworth in all the heat of his first disappointment and disgust:—

"I told you my review was a very imperfect one ; but what you will see in the *Quarterly* is a spurious one, which Mr. Baviad Gifford has palmed upon it for mine. I never felt more vexed in my life than when I read it. I cannot give you an idea of what he has done to it out of spite at me. The *language* he has altered throughout. Whatever inadequateness it had to its subject, it was in point of composition the prettiest piece of prose I ever wrote ; and so my sister (to whom alone I read the MSS.) said. That charm, if it had any, is gone ; more than a third of the substance is cut away, and that not all from one place but *passim*, so as to make utter nonsense. Every warm expression is changed for a nasty cold one. I have not the cursed alterations by me ; I shall never look at it again. . . . But that would have been little, putting his shoemaker phraseology (for he was a shoemaker) instead of mine, which has been trusted by better authors than his ignorance can comprehend—for I reckon myself a *dab* at prose ; verse I leave to my betters. God help them if they are to be so reviewed by friend or foe as you have been this quarter—I have read 'It won't do'—But worse than altering words, he has kept a few numbers only of the part I had done best. . . . I know how sore a word altered makes me ; but, indeed, of this review the whole complexion is gone. I regret only that I did not keep a copy. I am sure you would have been pleased with it ; because I had been feeding my fancy for months past with the notion of pleasing you. . . . I read it at Archie's shop with my face burning with vexation, with just such a feeling as if it had been a review written against myself, making false quotations from me. . . . But I could not but protest against your taking that thing as mine. Every pretty expression (I know there were many), every warm expression (there was nothing else), is vulgarised and frozen. If they catch me in their camp again, let them spitchcock me ! They had a right to do it, as no name appears to it ; and Mr. Shoemaker Gifford, I suppose, never waived a right he had since he commenced author. Heaven confound him and all caitiffs !"

When both these reviews had become respectable in point of age, and thoroughly established in their reign over the literary opinions of England, another periodical

suddenly burst into the field with an energy and brilliant vigour, a romantic ardour and temerity, which deserved the alarm and resentment, and all the hot words usually employed in respect to the *Edinburgh Review* much more than that periodical itself. This new and startling competitor for public favour arose also among those supposedly canny and cautious Scots, whose conventional reputation as decorous and prudent has never suffered in the general from these remarkable exceptions to it. The originator in this case was no brotherhood of eager young writers anxious to flesh their maiden swords upon all possible adversaries, and set the world in a turmoil; but one long-headed and far-sighted man, without any literary genius of his own, but with an insight which has become hereditary in his family. William Blackwood, an Edinburgh bookseller, of no great standing at the time, became the publisher of an insignificant *Edinburgh Magazine* in the beginning of 1817, under the auspices of two writers whose names have faded out of recollection, though one of them, Thomas Pringle, was the author of some pleasant verses, full of that tender and simple patriotism which is so often the inspiration of the native Scottish poet, and which still hold a place in school reading-books and collections of poetry. A short time, however, was enough to show that these mild members of the literary profession were little qualified to work with, much less to overmaster, the strong and active mind of the publisher into whose hands they had fallen. They were impressed with a full sense of their own consequence as literary men, as independent as Jeffrey himself, then the autocrat of literature; while he on the other hand, with an exceptionally acute and vigorous mind of his own, and determined to “make a spoon or spoil a horn,” had little idea of restricting himself to the ordinary passive part allotted to the “bookseller” in the somewhat contemptuous jargon



of the day. In six months, accordingly, there was a split between the two quite unharmonious elements. Mr. Blackwood took personal possession of the *Magazine*, which already bore his name, and decorum and dulness departed with the two deposed editors. The first number under the new *régime* is reckoned as No. 7 in the *Magazine*; but no such easy mark of the change of management is necessary to distinguish between the feeble commonplace of the one series and the daring and break-neck vehemence of the other. The new supporters whom the enterprising publisher called to his aid were once more a group of young men, chiefly young advocates, like those of the *Edinburgh Review*, but on the other side of politics, and in themselves more brilliant, more reckless, more adventurous, than their predecessors.

This venture altogether was more exciting and daring than that which Jeffrey and his band had launched fifteen years before. The stately review came but four times in a year, appearing at intervals which left abundant time for its production; but a monthly magazine was a greater strain upon the resources, both mental and commercial, of its originators. The first number of the newly organised *Magazine* burst upon the world like a thunderbolt. It contained the most savage onslaught that had yet been made upon the Lake School in the person of Coleridge; and a wild attack, at the same time, upon another new order of poets, boldly branded (though in this Southey had taken the lead) as the Cockney School, and impersonated in the (poetically) harmless person of Leigh Hunt. But these 'papers, though striking enough and full of the keen and sharp personalities which pleased and excited the age, were as nothing in comparison with a third, the joint production of all the young, furious, and frolicsome band, the extraordinary article known as "The Chaldee Manuscript." No fugitive publication, perhaps

was ever more talked of, or so generally known. It concerned the inhabitants of Edinburgh alone, and was so full of local allusions as to be fully comprehensible to them only; yet such was the audacious wit, and such the boldness of the attack, that it stirred the air far beyond Edinburgh, and penetrated into all the echoes. Professing to be a lost manuscript recently discovered, this brilliant hoax conveyed, in the most perfect copy of biblical language, an allegorical representation of the conflict between the former editors and the present; aided on one side by Jeffrey and all his Whiggish host, and on the other by a new brotherhood of critics, suddenly revealed in the interest of the publisher. There was nothing actually profane in its meaning; but the admirably imitated style made it appear so to many readers, whose delight in a mystification so congenial to the taste of the time was rather enhanced than lessened by their horror at the form it took. The gratification of the eager Edinburgh audience, which comprehended all its allusions and could identify every individual named, was intense, and the commotion it created indescribable. "The town is in an uproar about the Chaldee manuscript in *Blackwood's Magazine*, which contains, in a very irreverent and unjustifiable form, a great deal of wit and cutting satire," writes Mrs. Grant. . . . "Jeffrey is the Bonaparte of literature here; and, I think, this confederacy of petulant young men seem encouraged to attack him by the fate of his prototype." Jeffrey himself had been a petulant young man, slinging his stones right and left so short a time before, that his position as the victim of this assault, which was too figurative to be deeply offensive, could scarcely call forth any vehement sympathy. But a more audacious gage of battle to all and sundry, and defiance to the world in general, could not have been delivered. The notables of Edinburgh must have followed each line

with a tremor of excitement lest they themselves should be the next assailed. It is impossible not to feel now, when all this ferment of fire and fury has so long sunk into forgetfulness, that to expend so much force and talent upon a petty quarrel and local vengeance was a sad waste of energy; but that is never the feeling, at the time, of the actual combatants in such a fray.

It is not in our power, even were it of sufficient interest to the reader, to trace out the different characters so boldly assailed. Some, however, of the combatants on the Blackwood side, the new group of critics, are identified in a few lines: "The first that came was in the likeness of the beautiful leopard from the valley of the palm-trees, whose going forth was comely as the greyhound, and his eye like lightning of fiery flame. . . . There came also from a far country the scorpion, which delighteth to sting the faces of men." The two men thus characterised played a large part in the literary history of their time. The first, John Wilson, is almost entirely identified with the daring periodical, in which his great powers became first known. The other, John Gibson Lockhart, though with less genius, occupied a wider sphere. Before, however, we pass on to these two remarkable figures, and to the other members of the band, we must return to point out the individuality, not less remarkable, of the founder of the undertaking. The rush of prodigal energy with which these young writers took possession of the world's attention, had consequences which came less sharply upon themselves than on the important but homely personage who stood behind them. Their pranks were such as carried the public by assault; yet the assault was not only dauntless and brilliant in the highest degree, but often insolent and violent: a sort of Berserker rage was upon them, and the power of being able to give forth any wild impertinence they pleased seems to have partially turned their

heads. But it is curious beyond measure to see the wary and keen man of business, the astute publisher-editor behind these riotous spirits, holding them in an invisible leash, yet, with bold calculation, allowing them to go to the very verge of the impossible, to endanger his purse and risk his venture, just shaving the hem and thin edge between ruin and victory. Had this license gone a hair's-breadth farther, *Blackwood's Magazine* would probably have been a six months' wonder, and ended in a crowd of prosecutions for libel, or perhaps in horsewhippings and duels, which were the wilder fashions of the day. But by some instinct which is incommunicable, and as capricious as genius itself, the daring but unseen guide divined the limit. He was aware that

"Desperate valour oft made good  
Even by its daring venture rude,  
Where prudence might have failed."

There can be no doubt that the onslaught, with all its indecorous force, accomplished what a more orderly and serious beginning would have failed to do.

It is now time to put before the reader the Tory side of the "petulant young men" who had thus for a second time turned society upside down. The "leopard" of the Chaldee was John Wilson, one of the most notable figures of modern literature. A more extraordinary contrast to the small, vivacious Jeffrey than this fine athlete, with his splendid person and marvellous gifts, his arm as strong in the fray with any gigantic tramp or gipsy that defied him, as with the helpless writer who could only writhe and shriek for vengeance in his grasp, his "front like Jove," and his emancipation from all rule, could scarcely be. At this period, Wilson was a very type of strength, prosperity, and happiness. He had got all that was best in the differing educations of the two countries—in Glas-

gow, its philosophy and literature; in Oxford, its classics and its society. He had lived for years in the Lake District, and had even come to be considered one of the lesser members of the "Lake School." In Edinburgh he was received with all the warmth which a little poetical fame was calculated to add to the natural welcome given to a handsome, rich, amusing, and delightful stranger, with a pretty wife, and everything well authenticated and honourable about him. "He is young, handsome, wealthy, witty," says Mrs. Grant, "has great learning, exuberant spirits, a wife and children that he doats on, and no sin that I know, but on the contrary, virtuous principles and feelings. Yet his wonderful eccentricity would put anybody but his wife wild."

Wilson was at this time the author of two poems, the "Isle of Palms" and the "City of the Plague," in which fine-drawn sentiment and an over-wealth of conception and poetic diction were more conspicuous than genius. From these early productions, and from the sickly sweetness and sentimentality of the tales and romances of his later years, the "Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life," etc., the reader would form very little idea of the real wealth and faculty of the man,—the exuberant genius which for so many years poured forth lavish floods of wit and wisdom, of frolic and song, of the gayest banter and the finest criticism, in the pages of the magazine of which he was the chief and most lasting inspiration. The *Noctes Ambrosianæ* is not, unfortunately, a work of the kind which could be expected to last. The highest genius could scarcely put immortality into these records of the moment—and not only of the moment but of the convivial moments of a life by no means strait-laced, and of which it was his fancy to exaggerate the license tenfold in description. Whether Wilson counted the cost, and soberly chose to produce a supreme blaze of effect in his lifetime

rather than to leave anything for posterity, we cannot tell. Perhaps it may be said that sober calculation was not in him ; but it is very possible, we think, that, consciously or unconsciously, he may have made some such bargain with himself and fame. Whoever will attempt now to read the *Noctes* will find in them the outpouring of such an abundant and exuberant soul as has rarely flowed forth with equal *abandon* in literature. Here and there he will be touched by passages which are lyrical in their wonderful flow and rhythm, though they never abandon the form of prose, by descriptions full of the most brilliant life and colour, and always by a medley of passion and criticism, tenderness and laughter, which is unique, and has no rival. The mixture, no doubt, has poorer elements, chief of which is the ever-present spice of locality and personality, which impairs the enjoyment of those who know neither the place nor the individuals, and is very apt to disgust an impatient reader. But even with these drawbacks, the attempt to understand the *Noctes* is worth making. To place all these generous utterances of a big heart and teeming brain in the atmosphere, even of the most refined of taverns (which "Ambrose's" does not pretend to be), is not so much a mistake in art as the most wasteful discounting, so to speak, of the author's reputation : but this very familiarity of illustration made the effect prodigious at the time.

There is something more, however, in the *Noctes* than even the eloquence and the poetry—there is at least one character which raises the curious living record of so many quickly-passing moments to the height of a drama. The other characters introduced are dim enough, but the Shepherd is one of the most delightful impersonations of tender Scotch humour that ever was created. How much he really resembled the rude yet wonderful peasant, uncultivated, uninstructed, and with his coarse homespun

often enough appearing under the ideal Shepherd's maud that veiled him, but withal with a delicate vein of poetry running through his coarser metal, cannot now be ascertained. The Ettrick Shepherd in himself is very worthy of notice, and some small portion of the poetry he produced has a real touch of the divine, and is worthy of a place among the poetry which the world will not let die; but the Shepherd in the *Noctes* is much greater than his prototype. When Wilson was at his finest, when the stream of his boundless eloquence was at its purest, it was through the lips of the Shepherd that he spoke. If he leaves here and there an alloy of vanity, a touch of folly, in the being whom he manipulates so lovingly, it is no more than enough to make it credible that James Hogg, glorified by the touch of a genius superior to his own, but still James Hogg, in real flesh and blood, might have sat for the portrait. An attempt has been made recently, by a well-qualified hand, to detach from all superfluous matter what has been called the "Comedy of the *Noctes*;" but we doubt whether readers in any quantity will ever attempt to thread the long-drawn mazes, and go masquerading into the abodes of a worn-out fashion of life, too recent to be picturesque, too far off to be sympathetic. And apart from the *Noctes* Wilson cannot be fully known; though the wonderful wealth of his criticism and the sports and descriptions of Christopher North will give a far better idea of his character than either the poetry or the romantic and sentimental fiction which he has left behind him. After all the others had faded,—when Scott was gone, and little Jeffrey, and even the great preacher Chalmers, who divided the suffrages of the city with them,—Wilson still remained, the last great relic of that tide of intellectual power which had swept over Edinburgh. Loosely clad and largely made, with flowing locks and a majestic presence, his recollection is

still fresh in the minds of many. But this recollection has carried us far beyond our immediate theme.

The "scorpion who delighteth to sting the faces of men" was John Gibson Lockhart, the future son-in-law of Scott, and for a long time after a power in literature. The description here given of him is sufficiently candid, supplied as it was by a friendly hand, and it proves that keen and bitter wit was even then allowed to be his most striking characteristic. It is curious that a man with so many qualities, who proved himself afterwards in his *Life of Scott* so capable of truly comprehending real moral excellence, and in some of his novels so sensible of many of the most tragic emotions of the mind, should impress his associates chiefly with those stinging powers. He was a contributor to the new *Magazine* for a number of years, until he was transplanted to London and became the editor of the *Quarterly Review*. His novels have not kept much hold upon the public mind, but they are none of them without merit. *Valerius* is one of the most successful of the two or three studies of the life of the early Christians in Rome which have appeared from time to time; and the very curious, tragic, and painful book called *Adam Blair* is one that nobody who has read it will easily forget.

The Ettrick Shepherd, to whom we have already referred as, in his glorified conception, the hero of Wilson's great work, was a diffuse and unequal writer, but is remembered chiefly as the author of a most delicate and visionary piece of verse much unlike his rustic personality and the general level of his productions. The description of "Bonnie Kilneny," from the "Queen's Wake," a poem full of fine passages, of which this is the especial gem, is quoted in every collection of poetry, and it seems unnecessary to repeat it here. It is by far the highest note that Hogg ever attained. Whether he had



actually any share in the production of the new *Magazine* it is difficult to say, since Wilson has so connected him with its history as to make it impossible to sever him from the band of writers who brought it forth. Other names of more note and influence than that of the Shepherd figure in the list. Sir William Hamilton, the future philosopher, was present at the uproarious sitting during which the Chaldee Manuscript was produced, and composed one of the verses so much to his own satisfaction as to fall from his chair exhausted with laughter after the exertion. Thus Edinburgh was once more the scene of one of the great events of modern literary history. All the magazines of more recent days are the followers and offspring of this periodical, so audacious in its beginning, so persistent and permanent in its influence and power.

The success of the new organ of opinion was immediate. "Four thousand of this cruelly witty magazine," writes Mrs. Grant, "are sold in a month, at which I do in wonderment abound, as a great many are sold in London, where, I should suppose, our localities could be little understood, and certainly nothing could be more local. . . . It is supported by a club of young wits, many of whom are well known to me; who, I hope, in some measure fear God, but certainly do not regard man."

It is curious, however, to find that upon the vexed question of the time—the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge,—the new *Magazine*, though its chief contributor had been supposed to belong to the "Lake School" of poets, was in no respect more clear-sighted or more liberal than Jeffrey, their arch-enemy, had been. The assault upon Coleridge in the first number is far more fiery and furious than anything Jeffrey ever wrote; and the series of articles which followed upon Leigh Hunt and the

"Cockney School" embody a literary mistake as grievous as was ever committed. "I propose," says the contemptuous critic, addressing Leigh Hunt by name, "to relieve my main attack upon you by a diversion against some of your younger and less-important auxiliaries—the Keatses, the Shelleys, and the Webbes." For a magazine which shortly afterwards treated with judicial dignity the shortcomings and blunders of Jeffrey, this slip was terrible enough. In after days, however, Wilson's delicate and enthusiastic criticism did much to gain for Wordsworth the popular appreciation which was so slow to come.

WILLIAM GIFFORD, born 1756 ; died 1826.

Published *The Baviad*, 1794.

*The Mæviad*, 1795.

Edited *The Anti-Jacobin*, 1797-98.

*Quarterly Review*, 1808 to 1824.

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GEORGE CANNING, born 1770 ; died 1827.

Published little except the poetry in the *Anti-Jacobin*.

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JOHN HOOKHAM FRERE, born 1769 ; died 1846.

Published *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin*.

*Whistlecraft* (Prospectus and Specimen of our intended National work), 1817.

Metrical Translation of the "Birds" and "Acharnians" of Aristophanes.

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FRANCIS JEFFREY, born 1773 ; died 1850.

Editor of the *Edinburgh Review* from 1803 to 1829, in which innumerable critical articles were published ; afterwards collected in four vols., 1824.

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SYDNEY SMITH, born 1771 ; died 1845.

Published Contributions to Edinburgh Review, from 1802.

Peter Plymley's Letters, 1807.

Various political pamphlets.

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HENRY BROUGHAM, born 1778 ; died 1868.

Published Mathematical and Scientific Papers, 1796-1798.

Inquiry into Colonial Policy, 1803.

Discourses on Paley's Natural Theology, 1835.

Memoirs of the Statesmen of the Reign of George III.,  
1839-1843.

Lives of Men of Letters and Science, 1840.

Political Philosophy, 1840.

Analytical View of Newton's *Principia*, 1855.

Speeches, Collected, etc. etc.

His own Life and Times (incomplete), 1871.

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JOHN WILSON, born 1785 ; died 1854.

Published Isle of Palms, 1812.

City of the Plague, 1816.

Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life, 1822.

(Several of these were originally published in *Blackwood's Magazine*.)

The Trials of Margaret Lyndsay, 1823.

The Foresters, 1824.

The Recreations of Christopher North, 1842.

He was the chief contributor to (though never editor of) *Blackwood's Magazine*, from 1817 almost to the end of his life.

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JOHN GIBSON LOCKHART, born 1794 ; died 1854.

Published Valerius : A Roman Story, 1821.

Adam Blair, 1822.

Reginald Dalton, 1823.

Matthew Wald, 1824.

Life of Scott, 1837-38.

He contributed to *Blackwood's Magazine* from its beginning, and became editor of the *Quarterly Review* in 1824.

JAMES HOGG, the Ettrick Shepherd, born 1770 ; died 1835.

Published Poems (chiefly songs), 1801.

The Mountain Bard, 1807.

The Forest Minstrel, 1810.

The Queen's Wake, 1813.

Also a great number of short poems and tales at various dates.

## CHAPTER III.

WALTER SCOTT.

WHILE the young men of the *Edinburgh Review* were setting out upon their bold enterprise from the neglected side of the Parliament House, and avenging their Whiggery, oddly enough, not upon its opponents, but upon the poets of their own party, another young advocate in Edinburgh belonging to the other side was slowly becoming known among his peers as possessing abilities beyond the common level, though no such brilliancy as that which flashed out, in sight of all the world, in the great *Review*. Walter Scott was the son of an Edinburgh Writer to the Signet, a respectable Scotch lawyer—with a traceable descent from the Scotts of Harden, and all the advantage of known and honourable connections; but he was no better off than his contemporaries, except in so far that he had a fair prospect of the rewards and encouragements then exclusively appropriated by his party in politics. He had been brought up, like all the rest, at the High School, after a dreamy and delightful childhood, chiefly spent in the country, where unconsciously he must have taken into his heart that world of rural life, with all its sights and sounds, the ewe-milkers, the farm labourers, the peasant race which no one has ever understood more completely; and at the same time all the traditions and ballads that floated about the

countryside—a lore as then neither prized nor chronicled, but dear to every fresh youthful spirit, and doubly dear to the boy whose ancestors had figured in the stirring dramas of the Border, and whose life was to be influenced throughout by their inspiration. Permitted as a child, by a partially invalid condition, the privilege of constant reading, he had called himself a “virtuoso” at a very early age, and claimed kindred with other readers and thinkers, to the great amusement of his family. At school, however, not even his lameness kept him back from a vigorous share in all the sports and frays of his comrades; and though the poetical side of his character was visible in many an hour of youthful leisure, it was not of a kind to obtrude itself upon the general eye. It revealed itself in summer holidays, when he would climb, with a cherished friend and a book, high up among the cliffs of Arthur’s Seat, and there, seated in a mossy corner, read the long evening through, while the light of the northern day lingered over the wide landscape. “He read faster than I,” says the companion of these silent hours, “and had on this account to wait a little at finishing every two pages before turning the leaf.” What thoughts must have been in the young reader’s mind as he “waited a little” while his slower comrade plodded on—and lifting his young eyes with all the light of genius in them, looked abroad, still with the fumes of the poetry in his head, over that wonderful landscape, the most picturesque of cities at his feet, the soft steeps of St. Leonard’s close at hand, and far away the blue distant Firth with its islands, and the low hills of Fife.

“Where’s the coward that would not dare  
To fight for such a land?”—

these very words, one can imagine, must have been in his mind as he lay on the grass, with all the confused

delicious dreams of a young fancy floating in his mind, and some vague previsions, who can doubt, of the wonders to come? It was not Jeffrey, we may be sure, or any other intellectualist, who accompanied young Walter on those lingering summer evenings, and laboured after him page by page; but there is no scene in his youthful life more delightful to contemplate than this, in which, as in Coleridge's most lovely poem, "All influences of soul and sense" mingle—the breathless pause in the reading, which was Spenser, perhaps, the survivor remembers, or the Decameron—

"The music and the doleful tale,  
The rich and balmy eve"—

and that scene in which the charm of natural beauty and grandeur combined with the passionate and visionary patriotism of youth.

Scott has been called a dunce at school, but this, he is himself careful to point out, was not the case. "For myself," he says, "I glanced like a meteor from one end of the class to the other, and commonly disgusted my kind master as much by negligence and frivolity, as I occasionally pleased him by flashes of intellect and talent." He was already the storyteller of the little community; and "in the winter play-hours, when hard exercise was impossible, my tales used to assemble an admiring audience round Lucky Brown's fireside: and happy was he that could sit next to the inexhaustible narrator." When he was fifteen he saw Burns—a wonderful incident in his life: and in return for a piece of information which nobody else knew, the name of a little known author, received a kind word and a glance from those eyes, which were like no eyes he had ever seen in any mortal head, as he afterwards recorded. At a later period he is supposed to have received from

another hand a mystic touch in the dark which made him a poet. This was conveyed to him by Mrs. Barbauld, who had brought with her on a visit to Edinburgh the translation of Bürger's *Lenore*, which William Taylor of Norwich, one of the first to open up the mysteries of German literature to the English reader, had lately written; the lady read this to Dugald Stewart—who, on his side, repeated as much of it as he could remember in the hearing of young Scott. The fragment, as recollected by the popular and beloved professor, and especially the two vigorous lines—

“Tramp, tramp! across the land we go;  
Splash! splash! across the sea,”

struck Scott's imagination greatly. “This, madam,” he is reported to have said long afterwards to a member of the Norwich circle which worshipped Taylor, “was what made me a poet. I had several times attempted the more regular kind of poetry without success, but here was something that I thought I could do.” This is a curious statement from a man whose head was full of every kind of stirring ballad. But there was apparently so much truth in it that it set him, as soon as he was sufficiently acquainted with German, to make a translation of his own of the same poem, retaining Taylor's lines; which he printed, by way, apparently, of helping him on in an unfortunate youthful attachment when he was about twenty-one, and which was received with some favour by his friends, if it did not do much for him with his love. Soon after he translated Goethe's *Goetz von Berlichingen*, a work, we humbly opine, not much worth the trouble of either author or translator, and executed some other little performances of the same kind for that curious little fictitious poet and personage Matthew Gregory Lewis, usually called Monk Lewis. These latter productions had



the effect of bringing out into the light a man whose name was henceforward associated with Scott's for good and for evil during almost all his after life—that of the printer, James Ballantyne. Ballantyne had been Scott's schoolfellow in one of the early preparatory schools he had attended in his childhood. He was, in 1779, after some attempts to establish himself in a better position which had failed, the printer and editor of a weekly newspaper in Kelso, his native town. Scott furnished him with some bits of news for his paper on one occasion when he was visiting in the neighbourhood, and showed him some of his contributions to Lewis's intended volume: and when their childish intercourse was thus renewed, his kind heart prompted him, by way of encouraging his old acquaintance, to have a few copies of the poems printed, in order that Ballantyne's skill as a printer, and his excellent type, might be seen in Edinburgh. Twelve copies were printed of this little experimental effort, and Ballantyne's fate was decided. The alliance was productive of many consequences to both—fame and extraordinary success, and luxury, and wealth for a time—but it would have been well for Scott had his brotherly kindness been less genial. Had the rash publisher been left to vegetate in his little town and print his newspaper, it might have been better for all concerned.

In the end of the century Scott married a pretty and charming girl, half French, half English, who does not seem to have counted for very much in his life, but who was a pleasant mate and brought him an undistinguished family, as is usual with men of the greatest magnitude. At the same time he was appointed Sheriff-depute of Selkirkshire, which provided him with the means necessary for his young household. This proves at once the immense superiority of Tory to Whig in those days. Jeffrey, though he had also married, with the utmost

daring, on something under £100 a year, and lived happily and hospitably upon the same up three pairs of stairs in a tall Edinburgh house, had no such chance possible. The luckier of the two had a pretty cottage at Lasswade, and many secondary advantages; and his Sheriffship brought him, besides the secure income which is of such vital importance to every struggling young man, a reason and excuse for many wanderings about the country, which was his true study and workshop, though as yet he knew it not. By this time he had taken up what may be called his first real literary venture, his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, the most congenial work which could have been found, and perhaps one of the best exercises for his future career. In his legal expeditions through the little towns of Selkirkshire and the wilds of Ettrick Forest, he had his eyes and ears open for every song and ballad, and every congenial spirit who could help him to obtain such. And it is curious and touching to see how, as he goes on, name after name comes to light, which are henceforward to be associated with his whole after life. In one farmhouse he finds William Laidlaw; in another James Hogg, the most entirely self-taught and nature-trained of all the rustic poets. Hogg had "taught himself to read by copying the letters of a printed book as he lay watching his flock on the hillside," which is as nearly like the invention of that medium of communication for himself as can well be; and he was now, in his young manhood, no more than a shepherd, though he had begun with the earliest instinct of the peasant poet to write songs of his own, and was full of the minstrelsy of the district, the humble traditionary literature in which his mother had nursed him, as the mother of Burns had nursed her greater son. It is strange to see how large a part this floating oral literature had to do with the education of the Scot, and

how little it appears to show in the records of the other side of the Border, though there is no lack of English ballads to answer the same fine purpose. Bishop Percy and the gentlemen-antiquaries seem to have appropriated the study farther south; but Scott's associates in the Forest, the young sheep-farmers, the labouring hinds and shepherds, entered with enthusiasm into his pursuit.

He fell upon another assistant and associate in Edinburgh of a similar class by origin, but of acquirements so extraordinary and character so strange, that he merits a fuller notice. A wilder and more eccentric figure has rarely appeared in literature. This was John Leyden, a homely, shy, yet vain youth, from the south of Scotland, the very district which "the Shirra" was continually surveying, the son of a small hillside farmer, a being as boisterous as the winds and as wayward, a rustic enthusiast, a tender poet, a preacher licensed by the Church, and one of the most learned men of his generation—but with so many ridiculous characteristics and so bizarre both in mind and person, that it is difficult to award to him the applause of which he is truly worthy. He was one of those very poor students whose existence gave—and to some extent still gives—a special character to the little world of a Scotch University; one of the most penniless and unkempt of all the sons of letters, asking nothing of fate but knowledge, and feeding wildly upon everything in that shape which came in his way, without ever acquiring one of those graces of culture which to many are of so much more importance than culture itself. Constable, the enterprising bookseller, who did not hesitate to offer terms which were "without precedent," to the writers of the *Review*, had begun his career not very long before in a little shop where rare old books, of which he was a lover, were to be found as well as the new. There one of the "foreigners," who then frequented

Edinburgh, a gentle English *virtuoso*, book-lover, and student, Mr. Richard Heber, the elder brother of the future bishop, was a frequent visitor; and his attention was soon drawn to another frequenter of the shop, a scholar very unlike any species with which he was acquainted, speaking the broadest Scotch, as strange in manner, clothes, and appearance, as he was in accent, who, sometimes perched on a ladder, sometimes buried in a dusty corner, devoured the books which he could not afford to buy. Mr. Heber had become acquainted with Scott, and interested himself actively in the *Scottish Minstrelsy*. One day when in Constable's shop he fell by chance into conversation with this wild fellow-reader, whom he had so often watched with amusement, and soon found in him a kindred student. Leyden loved the legendary lore of his country as he loved everything else that belonged to his native dales—and this revelation brought about an introduction to Scott and to many gentle and cultivated persons otherwise entirely out of the poor student's way. Scott discovered that he was the author of many translations from the classics, and also from various European languages, which had appeared in the pages of the little *Edinburgh Magazine*, the mild successor of the *Mirror* and *Lounger*, and the predecessor of *Blackwood*; and his very oddities and homeliness seem to have attracted all with whom he was brought in contact. Lord Cockburn describes this eccentric personage with all his usual genial breadth of touch:—

“John Leyden has said of himself, ‘I often verge so nearly on absurdity that I know it is perfectly easy to misconceive me as well as misrepresent me.’ This was quite true. He cannot be understood till the peculiarities to which he alludes are accounted for. . . . Ever in a state of excitement, ever ardent, ever panting for things unattainable by ordinary mortals, and successful to an extent sufficient to rouse the hopes of a young man ignorant of life, there was nothing that he thought beyond his reach; and not knowing

what insincerity was, he spoke of his powers and his visions as openly as if he had been expounding what might be expected of another person. According to himself, John Leyden could easily in a few months have been a great physician, or surpassed Sir William Jones in Oriental literature, or Milton in poetry ; yet at the very time he was thus exposing himself he was not only simple but generous and humble. He was a wild-looking thin Roxburghshire man, with sandy hair, a screech voice, and staring eyes, exactly as he came from his native village ; and not one of those not very attractive personal qualities would he have exchanged for all the graces of Apollo. By the time I knew him he had made himself one of our social shows, and could and did say whatever he chose. His delight lay in an argument about the Scotch Church, or Oriental literature, or Scotch poetry, or odd customs or scenery, always conducted on his part in a high shrill voice, with great intensity and an utter unconsciousness of the amazement of strangers."

This strange being was what is called a probationer of the Church of Scotland, licensed to preach though not appointed to any charge ; but either because his odd manner and wild appearance made him unpopular, or from the want of inclination in himself, he does not seem, though he preached occasionally, to have shown any desire to follow his profession. After a considerable interval of vague projects he set his heart finally on going to India, and his many friends exerted themselves to get him an appointment. It was found, however, that the only thing to be got was a commission as surgeon assistant, and that to have any chance even of this he must go through his medical examination within six weeks. "This news, which would have crushed any other man's hopes to the dust, was only a welcome fillip to the ardour of Leyden. He that same hour grappled with a new science, in full confidence that whatever ordinary men could do in three or four years his energy could accomplish in as many months." His confidence in himself was justified, and he passed his examination and took his medical degree within the time appointed. Just before

leaving England he published a volume of poetry, including the *Scenes of Infancy*, which had previously had some local acceptance. Nothing can show better the devotion of his mind to the native landscape, which was always to him the most lovely in the world, than the following verses taken from that poem:—

- “ When first around my infant head  
Delusive dreams their visions shed,  
                    To soften or to soothe the soul ;  
In every scene with glad surprise  
I saw my native groves arise,  
                    And Teviot's crystal waters roll.
- “ And when religion raised my view  
Beyond this concave's azure blue,  
                    Where flowers of fairer lustre blow ;  
Where Eden's groves again shall bloom  
Beyond the desert of the tomb,  
                    And living streams for ever flow ;
- “ The gems of soft celestial dye,  
Were such as often met my eye,  
                    Expanding green on Teviot's side :  
The living streams whose pearly wave  
In fancy's eye appeared to lave  
                    Resembled Teviot's brimful tide.”

The simple enthusiast-patriotism which saw Teviot in every stream of beauty, and could conceive no better emblem of the streams of paradise, was Leyden's ruling passion. He went to India, however, disappearing for ever from Teviot and all the scenery and society of his native country, and went on his violent stormy way—like a sort of wandering irregular comet, most unlike, even in his indomitable perseverance and labour, to the conventional idea of the cautious Scot—through many a strange scene. His rapid initiation into the science of medicine does not seem to have done much more for him than ensure his appointment. Arrived in India, he became first a Pro-

fessor, then a Judge, and rapidly passed through various offices, each involving a new branch of information. While he was doing the active duties of these, he made a grasp at all the principal languages of the Continent. Finally he went with Lord Minto to Java, then newly added to the British provinces, and rushing into a shut-up house, where he had been informed a treasure of books was to be found, caught fever and died at thirty-six, in the year 1811. In his last illness, some friend who had gone to see him told him an anecdote of the Liddesdale volunteers, the men of his own district—how they had risen as one man on a false alarm of invasion, similar to that of which Scott makes picturesque use in the *Antiquary*. The Borderers came hurrying down from all sides, some of them swimming the river in their eagerness, and marched into Hawick at daybreak, playing the favourite air of the district, “Wha daur meddle wi’ me?” The story, the vivid recollection, the sudden exciting touch of all those emotions which were the very spring of his being, intoxicated the sick man. He sprang up in his bed, and in his harsh voice, more tremulous than usual in its shrill weakness, “with strange melody and stranger gesticulations,” sang in a transport of feverish enthusiasm the song of his native hills. A more characteristic conclusion could not be.

There is a kindred story told in illustration of the efforts of this enthusiastic coadjutor in Scott’s work, which is our more immediate subject, and which we may tell in Mr. Lockhart’s words:—

“An interesting fragment had been obtained of an ancient historical ballad, but the remainder, to the great disturbance of the editor, was not to be recovered. Two days after, while he was sitting with some company after dinner, a sound was heard at a distance like that of the whistling of a tempest through the torn rigging of the vessel which scuds before it. The sounds increased as they approached more near; and Leyden (to the great astonishment of such of the guests as did not know him) burst into the room

chanting the desiderated ballad with the most enthusiastic gestures, and all the energy of what he used to call the *saw-tones* of his voice. It turned out that he had walked between forty and fifty miles and back again, for the sole purpose of visiting an old person who promised this precious remnant of antiquity."

Such was the atmosphere of genial patriotic enthusiasm which Scott diffused about him, and which on every hand, in the most unlikely quarters, and under the most uncouth circumstances, he found a response to. In all his researches, in the exercise of his magistracy, in the little legal courts he held, and in his progress from one hamlet, from one farmhouse, to another, he was, like Cervantes in his tax-gathering, acquiring a more and more perfect knowledge of the unknown world which he was to reveal. Scotland, fresh and rural, with all those pastoral hills and wild moorlands; the salmon-spearing in the river, the otter-hunt, the farmhouse parlour, the more refined hospitalities of the laird; or, quainter still, the little circles of the country towns; the bailies and provosts, the minister in his manse, the women at their doors, the unpunctual coach, the quick-tongued landlady; all found a place in his memory. Not so much as the "natural," the "innocent," the harmless creature so often visible in Scotland about a hamlet or farm-stead, with curious gleams of natural cunning lighting up its gentle idiocy, was left out. He had no prevision of the use he was to make of all those kindly experiences; his head was full of ballad measures and scraps of antique verse—or at most humming with the simple inspiration of the Minstrel's *Lay* or the easy melodious story of the *Lady of the Lake*. He was all unaware of the issue that was to come of that friendly interest in men and all their ways which made every moorland path amusing and delightful to him, and touched men and dogs alike with the sensation of something brotherly and kind approaching. He was never



above his company, though that was of all sorts and conditions; and though he was thought in later days to be ambitious and aristocratical in his ideas,—as he certainly was in his principles,—no man could be more open to all sympathies and charities, or more entirely at home with his fellow-creatures, or at least his fellow-countrymen, wherever he met them. Genial mirth and fellowship accompanied him wherever he went. He was as happy with an old wife (if she knew any ballads) in her homely *but* and *ben* as with a duchess (though he was not without a true British devotion to duchesses too). His acquaintance was infinite, and there was nothing in life which he did not take the good of, with his mind and his eyes ever open, amid the most commonplace circumstances, to those notes of human tragedy which run through every strain, and to the pathos and uncomplaining pangs of existence, as well as to the humours and vanities and endless vagaries of the crowd. The very cows in the pastures, who were individual creatures to the milkmaids and almost human, entered into his economy of life. He saw everything, and laid up in store, in his great silent genial intelligence, all those varied scenes and still more varied people, without knowing what use he was to make of them; and thinking of nothing—save perhaps of the rhymed romances which were to win him an easy celebrity and a great deal of substantial recompense—followed the natural bent of his mind in making friends everywhere, and acquiring such an acquaintance with the untrodden ways of his own country as was scarcely possessed by any other man alive.

The publication of the *Minstrelsy* led by natural succession to Scott's first original work. Several of his own ballads had found a place in the collection, and by the time the third volume was thought of, mention is made of "a long poem . . . a kind of romance of Border

chivalry in a light horseman multitude, who have indeed intended to include in it. Thirsting of its strange difficulty in recognising this idea such explaining and *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, which, he it heartily. And proved too long for anything but independent more subtle. The *Minstrelsy* had a great success, bringing language money to its editor, not to speak of reputation, a number other poets put together had received for all their power ductions—a curious example of the peculiarities of the public taste and the different estimate made by contemporaries and by posterity. No doubt, however, that such a book as the *Minstrelsy* secured a crowd of easy readers, who would not have ventured to engage upon a long and serious poem, and whom the novelty and eccentricities of the *Lyrical Ballads* would have discouraged. One of the critics of the day described the book as containing “the elements of a hundred historical romances.” It was thus an excellent beginning to Scott’s career.

That career was almost too prosperous for a poet. He had money left him, or rather a small estate convertible into money, and flourished and increased. In 1804 he removed to Ashestiel, a house henceforth almost as closely connected with his memory as his own Abbotsford, and which was within the district of which he was Sheriff. In 1805, when he was twenty-nine, the *Lay* was published. By this time Ballantyne, whose then modest fortune seemed to have been made by the *Minstrelsy*, and before whom the brightest prospects were opening, had removed to Edinburgh, and the close connection between the printer and the poet, which lasted so long and ended so tragically, was begun. “The success of the *Lay*,” says Lockhart, “at once decided that literature should form the main business of Scott’s life.” No poem of that time, indeed, we believe, no poem of

above his company, though to immense a popularity on the conditions; and though he won the whole English world from the ambitious and aristocratic Pitt and Fox, agreeing in nothing was in his principles. The picturesque life of the strain, sympathies and freshness, the interest of the story, the his fellow-creature of an ancient world, in which all was where reasonable, where there was neither mysticism, nor accord any mystery beyond that degree of pleasurable wonder which stirs and stimulates without confusing the mind—all united to achieve the easiest and completest of conquests. That a poem which nobody, not even Scott's greatest lovers, would assert to be a great poem, should thus have triumphed over all the great poetry that was contemporary to it, is a marvel which no one has ever been able to explain. The copyright of the two unlucky volumes which contained the "Ancient Mariner" and many of Wordsworth's finest minor poems had a very short time before been given back to their authors as entirely without value, while this fresh and sparkling *Lay* brought Scott the best part of £1000, flew through edition after edition, and took the world by storm. The reason probably was that while the other poets of the time had been discoursing upon simplicity of language and the adoption of common modes of expression instead of the elevated diction of the past—without doing any more to carry out their professions than an Art deeper than these professions permitted—Scott, without saying anything about it, and with no deeper meaning to hamper him, really did what they professed to do, and wrote his poem in the simplest measure and the least distinctive language, making it as easy to read as any ballad. The "Mariner," save when it struck the dreamy fancy of some soul predestinate, one of those whom the weird narrator recognised at the first glance as "the man who must hear me," was, on the face of it, above and beyond

the comprehension of the multitude, who have indeed arrived at a glimmering understanding of its strange beauty now-a-days by dint of much explaining and lecturing, but who will never take to it heartily. And Wordsworth's treatment of some of the more subtle sentiments of the heart, although expressed in language ostentatiously simple, must always have left a number of readers agape. How, for instance, were the shallower souls, unacquainted with the mysteries of their own thoughts, to understand the wonderful little gleam of spiritual insight which is conveyed in the little poem—so clumsily named, and so weakened, short as it is, by unnecessary repetitions—the “Anecdote for Fathers”? Here the language, indeed, is simple enough, but the thought most abstruse:—

“ My Boy was by my side, so slim  
And graceful in his rustic dress !  
And, as we talked, I questioned him,  
In very idleness.

“ ‘ Now tell me, had you rather be,’  
I said, and took him by the arm,  
‘ On Kilve’s smooth shore, by the green sea,  
Or here at Liswyn farm ?’

“ In careless mood he looked at me,  
While still I held him by the arm,  
And said, ‘ At Kilve I’d rather be  
Than here at Liswyn farm.’

“ ‘ Now, little Edward, say why so ;  
My little Edward, tell me why.’—  
‘ I cannot tell, I do not know.’—  
‘ Why, this is strange,’ said I ;

“ ‘ For, here are woods, and green hills warm :  
There surely must some reason be  
Why you would change sweet Liswyn farm  
For Kilve by the green sea.’

" At this, my Boy hung down his head,  
 He blushed with shame, nor made reply ;  
 And five times to the child I said,  
 ' Why, Edward, tell me why ?'

" His head he raised—there was in sight,  
 It caught his eye, he saw it plain—  
 Upon the house-top, glittering bright,  
 A broad and gilded Vane.

" ' Then did the Boy his tongue unlock ;  
 And thus to me he made reply :  
 ' At Kilve there was no weathercock,  
 And that's the reason why.' "

There is perhaps no bit of metaphysics in the language by which an unenlightened reader would be so entirely puzzled as by this seeming simplicity. It is the very perfection of poetic insight, an evanescent thought caught on the flight and made everlasting, though too ethereal, too momentary, to yield its secret in its instantaneous passage to any eye less divinely qualified. Those who have eyes to see it perceive what is thus set before them, but to those who have not, a volume of explanation would make the matter no clearer. How different was Scott ! he has his perceptions too, but they throw no shadow of over-profound meaning upon the sunshiny tale. It flows like a blithe Highland stream over its rocks and stones—here dashing round a great boulder, there flowing swift and clear over the shallows. Compare with Wordsworth's subtle divination the picturesque and straightforward magic of the *Lay* : fair Melrose in the moonlight and the Wizard in his grave, and the strange illumination shining upon the pale visage of the Monk and the dark-brow'd warrior's mail, give the merest schoolboy a pleasurable thrill, and are comprehensible as a b c.

" Before their eyes the Wizard lay,  
 As if he had not been dead a day.  
 His hoary beard in silver roll'd,  
 He seem'd some seventy winters old ;

A palmer's amice wrapp'd him round,  
 With a wrought Spanish baldrick bound,  
 Like a pilgrim from beyond the sea :  
 His left hand held his Book of Might ;  
 A silver cross was in his right ;  
 The lamp was placed beside his knee :  
 High and majestic was his look,  
 At which the fellest fiends had shook,  
 And all unruffled was his face :  
 They trusted his soul had gotten grace.

"Often had William of Deloraine  
 Rode through the battle's bloody plain,  
 And trampled down the warriors slain,  
 And neither known remorse nor awe ;  
 Yet now remorse and awe he own'd ;  
 His breath came thick, his head swam round,  
 When this strange scene of death he saw.  
 Bewilder'd and unnerved he stood,  
 And the priest pray'd fervently and loud :  
 With eyes averted prayed he ;  
 He might not endure the sight to see,  
 Of the man he had loved so brotherly.

"And when the priest his death-prayer had pray'd,  
 Thus unto Deloraine he said :—  
 'Now, speed thee what thou hast to do,  
 Or, Warrior, we may dearly rue ;  
 For those, thou may'st not look upon,  
 Are gathering fast round the yawning stone !—  
 Then Deloraine, in terror, took  
 From the cold hand the Mighty Book,  
 With iron clasp'd, and with iron bound :  
 He thought, as he took it, the dead man frown'd ;  
 But the glare of the sepulchral light,  
 Perchance, had dazzled the warrior's sight."

Here is the straightforward supernatural in the most picturesque and romantic setting ; but who is there that could be in the least trouble to know what it means ? Michael Scott and his big book are plain as daylight in comparison with that urchin with his weathercock. There are no metaphysics in the whole fresh, musical, daylight

strain. Scott was not particular about the plainness of his language, taking what came, having no time to weigh syllables, but he made his tale so clear that he may run who readeth it. He was understood wherever he went. He perplexed nobody—more than they like to be perplexed by the honest intricacies of the story. This, we think, was the secret of the extraordinary and sudden conquest he made of the entire kingdom. The public had been hearing a great deal of the advantage of making use in poetry of common language and events; they had heard on the other side torrents of abuse poured upon this theory, and had been assured that poetry could not exist at all except according to the old canons. And lo, while the tumult went on over their heads, not leaving them calm enough to judge for themselves, here suddenly, carelessly, with a delightful spontaneous indifference to all principles of art, came in this new minstrel and sang them, in a light and flowing rhythm which carried them along like the tune of a ballad, a story they could understand from beginning to end! Perplexed by Wordsworth, confounded by Coleridge, finding themselves trapped by this professed simplicity into pitfalls of mysticism and miracle, what wonder that the common world of not too wise or discriminating readers escaped into Scott with a sense of relief which was at once enthusiasm and gratitude? Here, at least, was something fine, something spirit-stirring, like a martial air, like the native music of their country, which everybody, thank Heaven, could understand.

There is a curious story told of the effect produced upon Pitt by the new poem which is well worth quoting; he was so moved by it that an idea of advancing the author, who had such power over the imagination, struck even his preoccupied mind. Perhaps he felt that here was an influence, unthought of before, which might be

turned to use even in imperial affairs. "The Chancellor asked me about you and your then situation," said the all-powerful Dundas, who was a sort of Scotch viceroy and supreme manager of Scotch affairs and patronage, in a letter to Scott; "and after I had answered him, Pitt observed—'He can't remain as he is,' and desired me to 'look to it.'" He then repeated some lines from the *Lay* describing the old harper's embarrassment when asked to play, and said, "This is a sort of thing which I might have expected in painting, but could never have fancied capable of being given in poetry." The great statesman's idea of what could be expressed in painting, but not in poetry, is so curious that we must quote the passage:—

"The humble boon was soon obtain'd ;  
The Aged Minstrel audience gain'd.  
But, when he reach'd the room of state,  
Where she, with all her ladies, sate,  
Perchance he wish'd his boon denied :  
For, when to tune his harp he tried,  
His trembling hand had lost the case,  
Which marks security to please ;  
And scenes, long past, of joy and pain,  
Came wildering o'er his aged brain—  
He tried to tune his harp in vain !  
The pitying Duchess praised its chime,  
And gave him heart, and gave him time,  
Till every string's according glee  
Was blended into harmony.  
And then, he said, he would full fain  
He could recall an ancient strain,  
He never thought to sing again.  
It was not framed for village churls,  
But for high dames and mighty earls ;  
He had play'd it to King Charles the Good,  
When he kept court in Holyrood ;  
And much he wish'd, yet feared, to try  
The long-forgotten melody.  
Amid the strings his fingers stray'd,



And an uncertain warbling made,  
And oft he shook his hoary head.  
But when he caught the measure wild,  
The old man raised his face, and smiled ;  
And lighten'd up his faded eye,  
With all a poet's ecstasy !  
In varying cadence, soft or strong,  
He swept the sounding chords along :  
The present scene, the future lot,  
His toils, his wants, were all forgot :  
Cold diffidence, and age's frost,  
In the full tide of song were lost ;  
Each blank, in faithless memory void,  
The poet's glowing thought supplied ;  
And, while his heart responsive wrung,  
'Twas thus the Latest Minstrel sung."

What a clear, soft, animated description is this of an internal struggle, enough to touch the heart with easy sympathy without making any undue demand upon it either of emotion or understanding ! But where Mr. Pitt would have found a painter in his time to express all that on one canvas we are unable to imagine.

It is not unnatural, however, that Southey, getting three pounds seventeen shillings for his elaborate "Madoc" which had cost him so much labour, for which he had collected waggon-loads of material, and weighed every word, and verified every landscape, should record with a sigh of wonder, if not envy, that Scott had sold 4500 of the *Lay*, and made above a thousand pounds by it. It was hard not only to be surpassed, in the opinion of the critics, by those brethren-in-arms whom he allowed to be at least as great poets as himself, but to be outdone with the public by this new adventurer with the easy canter of his "light horseman sort of stanza." "You see the whole extent of his powers in the *Minstrel's Lay*," the mortified but not ungenerous poet wrote afterwards when he made Scott's acquaintance. And he characterises it, not unjustly, "as a very amusing poem: it excites

a novel-like interest, but you *discover* nothing on after perusal." It is not, indeed, at all wonderful that the poets who were possessed by a profound sense of the gravity of their mission should have looked on with an almost stunned surprise at this light and careless and easy success. Even the author felt himself called upon to "make the necessary deductions from his own merits in a calm attempt to account for its popularity." It was a surprise to himself as well as to the rest of the world.

Success so far above his expectation seems to have decided Scott to trust himself in future to the chances of literature and such preferment as he could obtain, and to give up the precarious practice of his profession, which had never brought him anything worth considering. He was, as we have said, already wonderfully well off for a poet. He is understood to have had with his Sheriffship about a thousand a year—a much more considerable income then than now. Shortly after the publication of the *Lay* he obtained another office—a clerkship of the Court of Session, a permanent appointment in which there was security for the future as well as gain for the present. About the same time he took another step more momentous still: which was the transplanting of Ballantyne and his business to Edinburgh—an expensive operation which required money. The consequence of several advances made by Scott to his humble friend was that the poet became the partner of the printer—an arrangement which was of the greatest, and finally of the most fatal, moment in the story of his life. This partial entry into the interests of "the booksellers" seems to have filled his active mind with a hundred schemes. "In the very first letter I have found from Scott to his partner," says Mr. Lockhart, "occur suggestions about new editions of Thomson, Dryden, and Tacitus, and moreover, of a grand edition of the British poets in one hundred volumes, of

which last he designed himself to be the editor." "In the course of the summer and autumn we find him in correspondence about another gigantic scheme—a uniform series of the ancient English Chronicles." Nothing could better show the energy of the man. He was far above any elation of vanity in the strange and bewildering success which had come to him—a success in which, we may almost be permitted to say, he himself never believed. And he set to work at once in the new channel opened to him, altogether unconscious yet of the much more brilliant channel not yet opened.

While he was planning these undertakings with the steadiness and resolution of a man determined to make his fortune as he best could for the advantage of his family, since his proper profession afforded no promise of advancement, the poetry, that wonderful accidental gift which he had found, by the way, without premeditation, was his greatest pleasure and diversion, among the many enjoyments of his genial life. Of *Marmion*, he says, "that the period of its composition was a very happy one in my life; so that I remember with pleasure at this moment some of the spots in which particular passages were composed." These words were written a quarter of a century after the composition of *Marmion*. And no doubt all the still and sweet recesses of Tweedside, the old ash-trees on the Sheriff's Knowe, the wilder moorland hills and braes beyond the green inclosure of Ashestiel, must have risen grateful and soothing before him as he wrote,—“Oh man!” he said to his son-in-law, in familiar, kindly, Scottish speech, when he was beginning to be old—“Oh man! I had many a grand gallop among these braes when I was thinking of *Marmion*—but a trotting, canny pony must serve me now.” When he was out with his volunteers, another informant tells us, “In the intervals of the drilling Scott used to delight in walk-

ing his powerful black steed up and down by himself upon the Portobello sands within the beating of the surge ; and now and then you would see him plunge in his spurs and go off as if at the charge, with the spray dashing about him. As we rode back to Musselburgh, he often came and placed himself beside me to repeat the verses he had been composing during these pauses of our exercise." The lines that were thus sung to himself, as his big horse thundered over the moorland, or splashed through the wet sands in a cloud of salt spray, have all the freshness of the northern air, and all the rhythm of winds and waters in them. Not so do the higher strains of divine poetry come into being. But Scott chanted his song of battle and adventure to himself, in a rapture of simple poetic feeling, enhanced by the wholesome fervour of happy life, by the excitement of rapid motion, and the full sweep and tide of being, which swelled all his veins and made mind and body harmonious. He had no prophet's burden to deliver, no solemn lesson to teach, but gave out to his audience in a genial and friendly flood the happy moments, the melodious impulses, and favourite studies of his own nature. It is imagination in its simplest and least complicated development—no drama, but a tale : with no profound under-current of meaning, but its happy significance on the surface, its simple loves, its martial progresses, its tuneful notes of generous conflict. Nothing mean or petty or poor is in the range of this cheerful, yet tender art. Simple as it is, the high-minded Scots gentleman on his big charger is in entire harmony with the strain. It never descends below his level. Before he transmitted it, all glowing with life and movement, to his audience, it had swept through his own mind like a brisk, melodious breeze, touching him with the same thrill of pleasure and feeling as that which moved the readers.

There is no evidence that Scott thought of his poetry

otherwise than in this light. He did not expect it to flow on for ever, nor believed that he had opened a perennial fountain. When the interest flagged he was not surprised, nor was he bitterly disappointed. The popularity of *Marmion*, indeed, he confesses, almost turned his head. It gave him "such a *hecze* (hoist) he had for a moment almost lost his footing." But he had far too much good sense ever really to lose his footing. Mrs. Grant compares him to a burning-glass which the rays of admiration went through without affecting it. The public, which was unanimous, did all it was possible to do to disturb the modest equilibrium of the poet. "The only question at issue," his friend Ellis wrote from London, from the midst of the best society, "is whether the *Lay* or *Marmion* should be reputed the most pleasing poem in our language." Thus, only himself was his rival, and it was generally allowed that there was nothing else by which to measure these two masterpieces.

One voice alone was raised against this universal conclusion. In the midst of such a chorus of applause, and an enthusiasm so general, there is something amusing as well as respectable in the impartiality and boldness with which little Jeffrey in his *Review*, at the height of his friend's success and fame, assailed the easy-tempered giant. One April night, when all the world had been burning incense round him, Scott received a number of that *Review* which still carried terror to every literary bosom. But he was a contributor, one of the brotherhood, and it can scarcely be supposed that he looked upon it with any alarm. Accompanying the *Review*, however, was a manly little note from the editor: "If I did not give you credit for more magnanimity than others of your irritable tribe, I should scarcely venture to put this into your hands," Jeffrey wrote. "I have spoken of your poem exactly as I think, and though I cannot reasonably

suppose that you will be pleased with everything I have said, it would mortify me very severely to believe I had given you pain." On the same evening the critic had been engaged to dine with the poet. Scott wrote to him at once, assuring him that no criticism could alter his friendship; but it is scarcely possible to suppose that when the guests arrived for that dinner there was not a somewhat rapid pulsation in the bosom of the dauntless little man whose integrity had been so painfully proved. Scott received him with all his usual cordiality; but the lady of the house could scarcely be expected to be equally heroic, and the clumsy little shaft which she discharged at her husband's critic has been preserved in the history. It is a curious passage-at-arms altogether. In the present day, when Reviews are less authoritative and authors more used to them, the occurrence would attract less attention; but the verdict of "Judge Jeffrey" then was more important than any verdict now, and the two men were members of a limited society through which the thrill of such an encounter would run like an electric current. There could not be a better proof of the impartiality of the *Review*, which, as its victims thought over the Border, was incapable of abusing anything Scotch; or of the courageous vigour which could thus oppose the tide of universal enthusiasm, and assail not only an influential member of society but a friend whom the critic could not help encountering every day.

Whether Scott's magnanimity was less great than it appeared, or whether it was the heightening fervour of politics which made it impossible for a Tory to find fellowship any longer in the Whig camp, it is difficult to ascertain, but, as a matter of fact, he here ceased to be a contributor to the *Edinburgh Review*; and it was not very long before all his political sympathies were enlisted for its rival, the new *Quarterly*, before which for

a moment even the bold Jeffrey quailed. The severance thus begun went farther than one of mere literature. It involved the business relations of the poet, as well as, his relations with his friends. Various accidents happened, which intensified, in the person of Constable the publisher, the first prick of offence which had been given by Jeffrey. And in the meantime James Ballantyne the printer had been joined by his brother John, who was believed to have the powers necessary for conducting an enlarged business. The consequence was that while the *Quarterly Review* was instituted in London, the firm of John Ballantyne and Co., of which Scott was an undisclosed partner, was established in Edinburgh, and became henceforward the chief undertaking of his life.

Unfortunately all manner of labours and embarrassments came in its train. Without this, all those reproaches that have been lavished upon him as to the extravagances of Abbotsford, and his supposed foolish weakness in desiring to leave a local habitation and an estate behind him for the enjoyment of his children after him—or of founding a family according to the ill-natured version of this most natural wish—might have been spared. He had an income of £1600 a year from his legal appointments, and received larger sums for his work than all the other writers of the time put together; and but for the drain of his badly-managed and unsuccessful business, in which he was the only partner with any capital, his lands and his mock castle, and his old furniture and properties, would have been very natural vanities. His life seems to have been hampered and embarrassed almost from the first moment of his connection with this unfortunate firm. It is a curious commentary upon popular opinion, which has been long so firmly fixed as to the caution and prudence of the Scotch character, to cast a glance from this distance across three parts of a century

at the doings of the "trade" in Edinburgh in those heroic days : at Constable, who "hated accounts, and systematically refused, during the most vigorous years of his life, to examine or sign a balance-sheet:" at the Ballantynes blundering jovially along—Messrs. Rigdumfunnidos and Aldiborontiphoscophornio, well worthy of these respectable appellations ; the one somewhat heavy in his loyal enthusiasm and readiness to take up everything that pleased the master-eye ; the other fun impersonated, "jocund Johnny," the gayest of book-keepers. That it should have been with these two simple and rash companions—rash with the extraordinary temerity of men who know little and have little to lose—that Scott with his noble intellect and supreme good sense plunged into unfamiliar business, is the most wonderful of problems. They kept him in perpetual amusement with their humours and contrast—they looked up to him with admirable devotion : and for these qualities he allowed them to draw him into ruin.

The *Lady of the Lake* appeared in 1809. There had been some wavering of comparison between *Marmion* and the *Lay*. There was none with this new poem. It took the world by storm. The public was unanimous in its favour ; the reviews vied with each other in celebrating this greatest poem of the age. Even Jeffrey, the "arch-critic," bowed down before it—he who had been so rash as to lift up his voice against *Marmion*. Scott had two thousand guineas nominally for it, but more in reality. "The whole country rang with the praises of the poet." And there was yet another evidence of his fame, which is the most extraordinary of all. "It is a well-ascertained fact," says Lockhart, "that from the date of the publication of the *Lady of the Lake* the post-horse duty rose in an extraordinary degree, and indeed it continued to do so regularly for a number of years, the



author's succeeding works keeping up the enthusiasm for our scenery which he had thus originally created." This is a quaint and picturesque-adjunct to literary fame which the greatest of writers could not hope for now. The *Lady of the Lake* was the culmination of Scott's poetical reputation. *Rokeby*, which followed, was bought and read almost as eagerly, but not received into the popular heart, and the *Lord of the Isles* was—for Scott—a failure. Why it should have been so it is vain now to inquire ; for its descriptions are as animated and its story as attractive as those of its predecessors, and the character of Bruce has a high and fine ideal nobility which is above anything in his previous works. But the vein, perhaps, was too thin at all times to bear much working, and was now wearing out ; while, on the other hand, a new poet, as brilliant, as comprehensible, and more romantic, with a much greater poetic genius—Byron—had entered the field, and Scott had for the first time a rival who, besides possessing higher qualities than himself at the heart of the matter, had as great a command of those gifts which gain the public ear.

Before, however, entering upon the history of Scott's more permanent triumphs, now about to commence, we must note the labours in which, throughout all this brief summer of extraordinary poetical fame he had been steadily engaged, chiefly to supply the ceaseless drain upon his powers made by the unfortunate firm, which had to be kept afloat, whatever happened. To many men such works as the *Lives of Dryden* and *Swift* would be sufficient to sustain a modest fame. To his exuberant genius this went for little. These were the daily work of his life, while his brighter inspirations were its exhilaration, its glory, its delight : but not less because they take so little importance in the record were they conscientious and valuable work. It is possible enough, we cannot

help feeling, that at this period of his career Scott may have looked upon himself as another Southey,—more popular, since his themes were far nearer to his audience and more interesting, but fated to the same kind of honourable and hard-working reputation after his flush of poetical fame should be past,—an able and trustworthy biographer, a commentator of endless patience and research, a writer wielding some power in the Reviews, and always with that soft aureole of poetical light upon his head, pleasing his friends and giving dignity to his career. It is difficult to imagine the genial and large being of the great Scotsman, with his universal hospitality and liberality, the wide atmosphere about him, the endless company—retainers, dependants, courtiers---fixed into such a groove of laborious excellence. But still it is evident that this is what might have been ; and as he went to his daily work after the Courts were over, and threaded through all the muddy literary byways—where among the garbage some scraps of knowledge of one or other of his subjects might be found, always with an anxious thought in his mind of those two merry companions who were compromising his name and bringing endless burdens upon him, yet were at the same time his faithful henchmen and supporters, not to be thrown off,—one is tempted to believe that this possibility must often have entered Scott's mind ; and that he must have realised the possibility of becoming a literary hack, though of the noblest kind—a constant and steady workman turning out his tale of labour, so many pages day by day. Many excellent men have done this, and served the world as honestly as any other kind of craftsman : but the idea has always been an obnoxious one, and the suggestion something like an insult. The poorest penny-a-liner would fain keep up a little fiction of taste and liking to dignify his drudgery. And in those days, when Jeffrey

hesitated whether writing for money was not altogether beneath the generous instincts of a gentleman, it must have been harder still to contemplate. From this fate, however, Scott was saved by one of the most extraordinary developments of unthought-of genius that ever was known.

In the year 1805, when the *Lay* was in its first tide of popularity, when James Ballantyne, newly come to Edinburgh, had just begun to tax the resources and excite the imagination of his princely friend with thoughts of an ideal publishing house and magnificent literary undertaking,—when his “barmy noddle” was “working prime” with so many plans and ideas that it was wonderful how one head could contain them,—Scott, with some sudden fancy for another kind of work, turned from his “Dryden” and wrote the opening chapters of *Waverley*. What chance touch of his brimful creative imagination it was that suddenly brought out of the mists, in the midst of all those dusty tracts and notes, the fine visionary scene of Waverley Honour, with all those high-bred accessories and that delicate group, a little too faint in colour, Sir Everard and Mrs. Rachel, and the graceful boy who was their heir, who can tell? The wisest prophet could ill have divined, from the soft neutral tints of this first picture, what sort of a succession, what brilliant groups, what animated scenes, were to follow. Even in his own later work, when he abandoned his best and most characteristic field and crossed the Tweed to English scenes and subjects, we do not remember any companion picture to that preface. Had he thrown himself into *Ivanhoe* at once, or taken up some romance of the Border, either enterprise would have been more likely. When he had put this beautiful sketch upon his canvas he paused doubtful, and showed the work “to a critical friend, whose opinion was unfavourable.” This, it is supposed,

was William Erskine. It was not, fortunately for them, Jeffrey or any of his band. Scott put his work away, so far as appears, without a sigh. He had so much in hand; what did a half-told tale matter? Some years after, when the strain of the Ballantynes began to tell, he took out his bit of manuscript and looked at it, grudging perhaps to have written anything that could not be made use of—and this time with a sigh put it back again. But, after a further interval of several years, chance again brought the old packet of papers to light. Scott himself gives an account of it to his friend Mr. Morritt, of Rokeby, in the following words:—

“I must now account for my own laziness, which I do, by referring you to a small anonymous sort of a novel in three volumes, *Waverley*, which you will receive by the mail of this day. It was a very old attempt of mine to embody some traits of those characters and manners peculiar to Scotland, the last remnants of which vanished during my own youth, so that few or no traces now remain. I had written great part of the first volume, and sketched other passages, when I mislaid the MS., and only found it by the merest accident as I was rummaging the drawers of an old cabinet, and I took the fancy of finishing it, which I did so fast, that the last two volumes were written in three weeks. . . . It has made a very strong impression here, and the good people of Edinburgh are busied in tracing the author, and in finding out originals for the portraits it contains. . . . Jeffrey has offered to make oath that it is mine, and another great critic has tendered his affidavit *ex contrario*; so that these authorities have divided the Gude Town. . . . Let me know your opinion about it. . . . The truth is, that *this sort of muddling work* amuses me, and I am something in the condition of Joseph Surface, who was embarrassed by getting himself too good a reputation; for many things may please people well enough anonymously, which, if they had me on the title page would just give me that sort of ill name which precedes hanging—and that would be in many respects inconvenient if I thought of again trying a *grande opus*.”

No man could have been more unconscious that the moment of the *grande opus* had come. No doubt Scott

often wrote with a playful depreciation not quite sincere, of his productions, which is the very comprehensible expedient of a man both modest and humorous, to elude extravagant praises and even his own vanity, if he has any. But in this case it is evident his mind was directed to an altogether different kind of *chef-d'œuvre*, and the anonymous novel, the sort of *muddling work*, was a bow drawn at a venture, upon which no very great hopes were fixed. The latter part of the book must all have been written between the 4th of June and the 1st of July, Mr. Lockhart informs us; and he tells a story of a party of young men over their wine, one of whom, the host of the occasion, changed his seat uneasily, that he might avoid the sight of "a confounded hand" writing at an opposite window. "Ever since we sat down I have been watching it," he said. "It never stops; page after page is finished and thrown on that heap of MS., and still it goes on; and so it will be till candles are brought in, and God knows how long after that. It is the same every night. I can't bear the sight of it when I'm not at my books." This was Scott's hand, visible at the back window of his house in North Castle Street, Edinburgh. And through all those long bright summer nights, the longest and sweetest in the year, he sat, never raising his head, with that crowd of new-created beings coming and going around him—Vich Ian Vohr in his torchlight hall, and Flora shrouding her high-bred beauty in her Highland plaid, and Evan Dhu, and all the clan; and the grotesque and generous presence of the Baron; and poor Prince Charlie, whom no Scotsman names without a certain pang; and all the tragic gaiety in the old halls at Holyrood. No need to pause as the swift scenes flew on, succeeding each other. Where, amid all the analysis in which we delight now-a-days, and all our studies of character, shall we find anything that stands out in such breadth of life? Scott is so far like

Shakspeare that we take him with us into history, and never know how much of our knowledge and our impressions is due to his genius, and how much to ascertained fact. And the effect upon his contemporaries was greater than any sensation that had been previously received from literature. Such fiction itself was a new thing. Since Richardson and Fielding there had been no work of this kind which men and women alike would care to read—if, indeed, men can ever have been said sincerely and generally to care for Richardson, or women for Fielding. Scott took in all and united them. He was manly, and he was pure. He gave no undue importance to sentiment, but he honoured honest love and the domestic affections. And while he was incapable of eclipsing the reasonable world with the shadow of Sport as some modern novelists do, he was as willing to spear a salmon or hunt an otter in literature as in life.

But the great thing Scott did was to unfold a new country, a new world to his contemporaries. We ourselves, calm in all the unconscious gain which his existence and work has added to the general inheritance, can scarcely realise to ourselves what it would be to Scotland to sweep Scott out of her. It is a thing, thank Heaven, which no calamity can do; but if it could be done, what an impoverished country would be left behind! This has been one of the unhappy particulars in the fate of Ireland, with which misgovernment has had nothing to do. She has had no Burns and no Scott. Her beautiful scenery has never been populated with noble and gentle human beings claiming the interest of the world. Her genius has wasted itself in wild verses, in the records of wild pranks and jokes. No great magician has made her shores familiar, not to Englishmen only, but to mankind; no poet of the highest order has sung her cabins and her fields. If the genius was there, it has been wasted, and

never come to fruit. Miss Edgeworth, it is true, made a beginning of this noblest of all works, and seemed for a moment likely to open a way by which the Irish heart might have been known; but she was not strong enough for the mission, and was soon led away from it to the moralities of the schoolroom and the complications of fashionable life. When Scott found his neglected manuscript in the drawer of the cabinet where he was seeking his fishing-tackle, Scotland was less interesting than Ireland to the general mind, and equally unknown. The ordinary Englishman's idea of the Scot had scarcely changed since the time when the first Stuart came to the throne, and his beggarly and grasping followers became the proverb of the ignorant but wealthy Southern, who saw in them nothing but a race of harpies and parasites. Such was the idea which Johnson entertained and expressed with a vigour which no courtesy veiled. Jokes about a supposed national disease (which are not quite extirpated yet, since nasty things of all descriptions are the slowest things to die), and sneers concerning the inalienable caution and craft, thrift and penury of the race, were all that was ever heard of the people: and the country was less known than America, or even Japan, is now. Macpherson in *Ossian* (false or true, the cause of so many controversies) had given a wild fictitious picture of unearthly wastes and mists, cloudy mountains and cruel seas, all melancholy, tragic, monstrous, and incomprehensible, in which the French and other foreign critics found a sentiment thoroughly appropriate to the mystic North, but which the English mind with much unanimity rejected as entirely out of its range, and not much worth investigating. When Burns raised his voice from the heart of this unknown land, there had been a thrill of excited attention and wonder; but Burns was so great a prodigy in every way, and everything about him was so beyond

expectation, that his nationality added only a surprise the more to the standing wonder of his existence at all. And that existence was so brief that the public mind had scarcely time to get over the shock of his appearance in his ploughman guise and peasant language, compelling its attention, and to inquire what manner of race it was which produced such a miracle, when the wonderful rustic disappeared and all was still again. When Scott, in his turn, presented himself with the fine ballad strain of his poems, bringing back the moss-trooper and the Border knight, the old picturesque chivalrous court of the Jameses, generous romantic monarchs of a land of romance, the glowing tartans and tragic passion, not wholly above melodrama, of the Highland chieftains, the imagination of the tourist began to be fired—if, indeed, that modern development of man was not created altogether by this new revelation: but still the revelation was very partial. When, however, the first novel of the *Waverley* series came into the world, the curtain rose, as in a theatre, upon Scotland, no longer a rugged North, a conventional country known by certain moral (or immoral) qualities, but for the moment the most distinct and clearly-evident of all the quarters of the earth, the chosen land of all that was humorous and all that was pathetic, full of an unsuspected and inexhaustible variety of character and wealth of emotion. The veil was drawn from her face, not only to other nations, but even to her own astonished and delighted inhabitants, who had hitherto despised or derided the Highland caterans, but now beheld silently with amazed eyes the real features of their uncomprehended countrymen, just as England and the more distant world awoke to know the “land of the mountain and the flood.”

We can understand but dimly at this distance, we who have been brought up upon *Waverley* and scarcely can remember when we first made acquaintance with



Tullyveolan and the Highland stronghold among the hills, any more than we can remember when we first set foot in Prospero's enchanted island—it is with difficulty that we can realise the first magical effect. The book was read everywhere by all kinds of people; it flew from hand to hand, and was discussed and talked over as if it had been the personal concern of thousands of readers. "Opinion!" said Lord Holland, when asked his opinion of the new book,—“none of us went to bed all night, and nothing slept but my gout.” The verdict was the same in much less lofty regions, wherever a copy could be laid hold of. Rich and poor were as one in the wonderful unanimous commotion. The success of *Waverley* was as great and as sudden as that of the *Lay*, and far more true. Indeed, one can scarcely help thinking that it was some unconscious prescience of this which was coming, and which deserved all fame, that made the public receive those tunings of the minstrel's harp and preludes of his real song so cordially. There were one or two dissentient critics—his own *Quarterly*, the Tory organ which he had helped to originate, being the chief. This periodical, still in the hands of the captious and bilious Gifford, objected to the use of the Scotch as “a dark dialect of Anglified Erse,” unworthy of ears polite. But this little malignant voice had no influence on the universal enthusiasm. Once more Scott's noble clear-headedness, his breadth of honest life, the light and warmth which filled his narrative, opened him a way of access to all hearts. These were not the highest qualities of his genius, but they were the qualities which interpreted his higher imagination to the common soul. He announced no lofty aim, professed no purpose of teaching—yet at a stroke set before the world the most perfect picture of a state of society which was passing, or had passed away; accounted for it, justified it, made it glorious—yet at the same moment proved the

impossibility of continuance in the system to which he could not but look back with tender regret: and with a fine candour and honest historical perception which was in advance of his own convictions, showed the crumbling foundations of the changed rule and the inevitable triumph of new lords and new laws to be both necessary and just. Even this valuable historical revelation was, however, but a secondary matter in comparison with the glow of character and human life which illuminated his country under his hand. We have learned now-a-days to be very shy of history in the form of tales. But the art was new in those days, and all its details were as fresh and picturesque as the story itself was moving and animated. With his usual modesty, Scott caused it to be represented to Miss Edgeworth that the first suggestion of his work had been taken from the excellence of hers. Thus, too, according to his own account, William Taylor made him a poet, and that pompous provincial accepted the idea with an evident feeling that it might very well be so. And Miss Edgeworth made him a novelist: but the more subtle Irish-woman did not take the graceful compliment *au pied de la lettre*, nor was it necessary.

And pouring into the world after *Waverley* came the flood of its successors, all instinct with kindred life, proving that no adventitious help of historical excitement was wanted, but that the humblest incidents of common life were enough to furnish at once drama and interest. The cottage of the Mucklebackits, with its simple tragedy, is brought as close to us as the rude hall of the Highland chieftain, and goes even more warmly to our hearts. Scott sets it before us as if he had been studying fishermen and their ways all his life. His sympathy enters into everything. The rustic dalliance on one hand, and on the other that sorrow of the poor which has to be put aside for the necessities of ordinary life, are all open to

his sympathetic eye; and with the touch as of a magician's wand he conjures all coarseness out of the one, and teaches us to feel for the petulance of grief restrained—the passion of sorrow which takes the form of irritation—in the other. As the brilliant series flowed on, it was as if each new study was the author's masterpiece; and so powerful was his touch, and so wonderful the stream of illumination which moved with him wherever he moved, that even the conventional and threadbare story of the lost child and his recovery, as a romantic heir and hero,—a story upon which all kinds of changes have been rung,—became in his hand new again. Meg Merrilees, it must be owned, is melodramatic in the highest degree, but we defy the most cold-blooded reader to follow without excitement the story of those strange events which make Captain Brown into Henry Bertram of Ellangowan; the thread of mystery, for which otherwise we should care little, is spun through and through such a varied and lifelike web of character and incident, that neither Scotland nor we could afford to lose it. Dandie Dinmont (for example) and all his wild pastoral world, the mild and wise gudewife, the generous simple liberality, the shrewdness, not without a touch of guile, and all the relationships of that fresh open-air existence, servants and masters, and litigious neighbours, who would like nothing better than to settle their disputes with singletick or broadsword, “if your honour thinks it wadna be against the law:” but would not raise the rent upon each other, or step in between their honest enemy and his natural advantage—is such a piece of large and sun-bright creation as could have reached us in no other way. “The Shirra” had noted them all, without knowing, as he went and came through the forest, and by all the moorland ways on Teviot and on Tweed. He saw Meg Merrilees, too, no doubt, some day by the wayside as he rode by.

His friendly eye saw everything involuntarily, without intention—whence all the freedom and spontaneous life. “I am a bad hand,” he says, “at depicting a hero properly so called, and have an unfortunate propensity for the dubious characters of borderers, buccaneers, Highland robbers, and all others of a Robin Hood description. I do not know why this should be, as I am myself, like Hamlet, indifferent honest, but I suppose the blood of the old cattle-drivers of Teviotdale continues to stir in my veins.” This is a subject of reproach against him by some feeble-minded critics—as if we should find fault with Shakespeare for his Claudios and Bertrams. It was only in our own day that another man of genius boldly put forth the doctrine of a novel without a hero, anticipating criticism by owning the difficulty of embodying the ideal, so as to satisfy our poetic principles, yet keep our interest. Scott did not succeed in this: his Waverley, his Bertram, his Henry Morton, are but very ordinary young fellows. But who else has done better? the *jeune premier* is of all inventions the most hard to manage—infinitely more so than the heroine, who, by right of her womanhood, may possess all the superlative qualities and yet have enough flesh and blood to keep a hold upon our sympathies. A pretty pair of lovers are a necessity universally acknowledged; but so long as they are pretty and spirited and generous, what do we want more? Romeo himself is little more than a gallant shadow. Orlando a long-limbed and picturesque impersonation of youth, not worthy to tie the shoes of that sweetest of all visionary maidens—the wise, the tender, the playful, the capricious, the impassioned Rosalind. We may frankly acknowledge, without any detriment to Scott’s reputation, this incapacity, which he shares with the greatest.

But it is impossible to record the unparalleled en-

thusiasm with which his romances were received, without casting a glance in passing at the revulsion of sentiment which his great countryman Thomas Carlyle was the first to begin, and which has been echoed not only by Carlyle's disciples but by the followers of that new school of analytical fiction which reigns at present in England. Carlyle's indictment against the author of *Waverley* has several counts, the greatest of which are—first, that he had no message to deliver—"wished not the world to elevate itself, to amend itself, to do this or to do that, except simply pay him for the books he kept writing," which we think is an entirely ungenerous and uncalled-for accusation, especially as it is repeated from sentence to sentence, as if money had been for ever in the thoughts of one of the most liberal and generous of men; and second, that he did not create, but "deceptively enacted, as a good player might," the characters he invented, making them "look and talk like what they give themselves out for; but fashioning them from the skin inwards, never getting nearer the heart of them." "The one set," Mr. Carlyle says, meaning the creations of Shakespeare, "become living men and women; the other amount to little more than mechanical cases, deceptively painted automats." "Not profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for edification, for building up or elevating in any shape!" he adds afterwards of these works, which, as we have endeavoured to point out, opened up Scotland to all the nations of the universe, and made her national character and faith, her humour, her passion, her daily life, visible to all men. Such a deliverance comes badly from any Scotsman; for it is impossible to us to conceive any such impoverishment of our country as that which would result could Scott and his creations be swept away from her, and could her Lowland plains and Highland hills relapse into the mists that covered them before *Waverley*

was. If it is unelevating and unimproving to fill a country with a visionary population, rich in every natural quality, with all the accidents and misadventures—all the tragic troubles and evanescent joys—of life, and not one debasing image, not one impure suggestion, not one setting up of the evil over the good in the whole range, then Scott was unelevating and unimproving ; and if it is possible to embody absolute and supreme truth in the homeliest guise with all the effect of an actual history, and to place a simple peasant woman by the side of the Unas and Mirandas, in sheer potency of veracity and love—without virtue and without genius, then let us acknowledge that Scott's motives were mean and his power superficial. It is to ourselves impossible to conceive how the career of Wilhelm Meister, through all the intrigues and fictitious loves of a theatrical company, can be supposed elevating, while the story of Jeanie Deans is set down as mechanical. Mr. Carlyle is<sup>1</sup> a great writer, and we are rash to venture to defy so great a champion—perhaps even there is something of the coward in striking upon the shield of one who has withdrawn from the field of battle : yet the greatest are but human. Scott chose for his ground of action the moment when the old Scotland and the new were as yet struggling for the mastery. Whether he consciously set before himself the object of proving once for all that his own side had lost the day, and how it had lost the day, we cannot tell,—or whether he intended from the beginning to show the subtle self-seeking which made the insurrection of the clans less noble, and the factious force of personal dislikes and family feuds that made it futile. But that he did so

<sup>1</sup> This was written before the death of Carlyle : it is better that it should remain as written, to show at least that the writer did not shrink during his lifetime from an unwavering opposition on this point to the judgment of a master venerated and beloved.

there can be no doubt. Vich Ian Vohr was more than the last of the Highland feudal princes ; he was at the same time the ambitious political plotter, whose aim was rendered hopeless by the very craft with which he pursued it ; and no historian had ever proved till Scott did how the cause of the Stuarts fell to pieces, how the old world (which he loved) came to decay, how all the elements of life and hope were ranged on the other side. He did this in spite of his sympathies and his principles, and in the very act of throwing the light of poetry and romance over the fallen cause, and attracting to it men's sympathies and charities as they had rarely been attracted before. For literature, save that of ballad and popular song, had never been on the Jacobite side. If history is a noble and dignified branch of literature, this poetical rendering of it, which was far more attractive, far more vivid than Hume's or Robertson's, can scarcely be stigmatised as containing no elevating or improving power.

And if it is not a bettering influence to show the callous or the indifferent how the hearts of their humbler neighbours can be wrung, and to prove that more true and generous than king or kaiser may be a gillie on the hill or a milkmaid in the cottage, we wonder what is so. This, too, was Scott's work, whether it was his conscious aim or not. His aim was to tell the manifold story in which he delighted, of his countrymen and kin ; he did this orally to all the strangers and pilgrims that intruded upon his leisure and disturbed his rest, but to whom he could not (by stress of nature) be anything but courteous, cordial, and kind. All day long these stories were flowing from his lips with a genial delight in the humours they contained. When put in writing they required a larger framework, a certain mechanism of romance, in which perhaps he was feeble occasionally, as all the greatest have been (so far as plots go, Mr Wilkie

Collins is a greater artist than Shakspeare and Scott put together); but the impulse was the same. There are greater artists, who delight in showing how every good action has some alloy of selfish motive, and every human creature an unworthy side. Is that more noble or more elevating than to open the door of a turf hut and show the deepest human emotions, the most princely generosity, the noblest affections, there? Scott was an aristocrat born; he loved the notice of princes, the fellowship of dukes. He was so weak as to wish, above all things, to leave his children well off and well endowed, "to establish a family," as people say. He loved the feudal rule, the supremacy of the gentleman, the superiority of race. He was an Edinburgh advocate, a member of a conventional society, very racy and strong, but eminently individual, and with the most marked character and limits. What was it then that made him conceive in homeliest simplicity such a being as that of Jeanie Deans, and set her above all the prettinesses of sentiment, by the side, as we have said, of the Unas and Mirandas? Was any one aware of the very existence of such a home and such an atmosphere as that which made her heavenly virtue possible, before Walter Scott built the gray walls, and led the mild and balmy breathing kine into the byre at St. Leonard's? Perhaps he had seen in his boyish days, as he scrambled up Arthur's Seat with his friend and his book, the old man sitting by the door, his "lyart hafflits wearing thin and bare," and heard his slow talk; perhaps even watched his daughter, simple and kind, looking over the little paling, shading her eyes from the slant rays of the westering sun in the long summer nights, looking out for some lingering home-comer — poor Effie or other wanderer; — and years after, when he looked for them, found these types of the old peasant-patriarch and the tender simple woman again. But even with these in his



mind, what would any commoner soul have made of it? Victor Hugo's Sister Simplice,—she who was the impersonation of truth,—lied when the moment of trial came to save the fugitive, and was blessed and applauded for the deed. But noble Jeanie, in her Scotch severity and purity and infinite tenderness, was incapable of this. She could have died easily, but to lie she could not. What we should have said of her if she had not been capable of doing more,—if she had not had the fortitude and the spirit to break through all her habits and modest fears, and win by fair means what she could not attain by foul,—it is difficult to say. Should we have forgiven Jeanie if Effie had died? But, anyhow, the best that Art has made of such a situation in other hands is downfall: the impersonation of virtue has always abandoned her austere career. As soon as the claims of generosity, of mercy, came in, Truth herself has stained her white garments, and the lie has been justified by being called heroic. Only to Scott, who, thus stabbed in the house of his friends, has been accused of having no noble object, no thought of anything but money in his productions,—only to Scott was the higher grace revealed. His kind and simple maiden would have sacrificed even her convictions if she could. But she was incapable of the falsehood. The reader who can stand by, so to speak, in the breathless court, and see all the crowd, eager counsel, rapt spectators, even the Judge upon the bench, waiting to hear the so-excusable fiction, the lie which would have been more than blameless, which would have been heroic—and refused to be moved, is a being beyond our comprehension; and how our great countryman Carlyle could have forgotten Jeanie is also beyond our understanding. No poet of his period so elevated, so consecrated the truth. Wordsworth's old man on the moor, who used a manner of speech "such as grave livers

do in Scotland use," might claim a certain kindred with donce Davie Deans ; but no one has risen to the height of Jeanie save her creator—a man so entirely without pretence, without sham, without any of the theatrical wrappings of a prophet, that even the Seer will scarcely allow him the office—which it was his to perceive under whatsoever disguise.

It is an entirely sophisticated and conventional art which depreciates such a picture as this as being a study of peasant character, and not made among the equals of the author, the more heroic and cultured class, to which it is courtesy to suppose every great writer must belong. The peasant has always a certain advantage over those who are bound by the limits of the conventional, and have to hide their own souls and impulses more scrupulously than is necessary on the other level. Otherwise it is not less but more difficult to embody the highest ideal virtue in a homely exterior. The old censors of art demanded beauty and ideal grace from all that was highest in moral excellence ; and it was one of the special features in the literary reformation of which we have been treating, that the favourites of poetic art now, and only now, began to be found in the huts where poor men lie. A beggar maid of matchless beauty had, indeed, always been a well-known figure in poetry, and one of the chosen heroines of the eighteenth century, that special age of the correct, had been the virtuous and well-conducted Pamela—that pure and prudent maid who came from her humble home to seek advancement, and was so admirably repaid for her virtue. But Scott's humble heroine had more disadvantages than that of her humble condition. "Had this story been conducted by a common hand," says a judicious correspondent, quoted in Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, "Effie would have attracted all our concern and sympathy — Jeanie only cold approbation ; whereas

Jeanie, without youth, beauty, genius, warm passions, or any other novel-perfection, is here our object from beginning to end." Nothing can be more curious, indeed, than the turn thus given by Scott to what might otherwise have been the most ordinary story of seduction and betrayal. Fiction great and small abounds in such tales—the pretty, vain, foolish girl gone astray, the "villain" who deceives her, the father and sister overwhelmed with shame. Put to it but the usual moral conclusion, the only one possible to the sentimentalist, the "only art" which the lovely woman who has stooped to folly can find her guilt to cover,—and the moralist has no more threadbare subject.

But Scott had a very different inspiration. His achievement is even greater in its way than that by which Shakspeare produced the spotless and lovely Isabella, the emblem of wise and noble purity in the midst of the deepest shame of evil living; for Isabella is as fair as she is pure,—a perfect lily-flower in the gloom of all those machinations with which we can scarcely endure to see her surrounded. But Jeanie is not lovely even in her excellence, her truth, and infinite tender affection. With the highest poetry of self-devotion in her, she is yet a piece of actual fact, real as the landscape in which she is enclosed, as her kine that browse upon the kindly slopes—yet a creature of the most heroic type, absolutely pure, absolutely truthful, full of a tenderness, forbearance, and long-suffering beyond the power of man, willing to die rather than to lie, but resolute that the truth her nature has forced her to respect shall not be used for harm if her very life can prevent it. And this flower of humanity expands and blooms out its slow sweet blossom, opening before our eyes without one momentary departure from the homely guise, the homely language, even the matter-of-fact channel in which her thoughts run by nature.

He is never made anything different from what the daughter of David Deans, cowfeeder in St. Leonard's, should be. In all her many adventures she is always the same simple, straightforward, untiring one-ideal woman—simple, but strong not weak in her simplicity, resisting all unnecessary explanations with a decision and firmness at which the clever, bold, unscrupulous villain of the piece stands aghast. He has not the courage to keep his secret, —he who has the courage to break hearts and prisons; but Jeanie has the courage. There is not one scene in which this high valour of the heart or her absolute sincerity fails her; nor is there one in which she departs ever so little from the lowliness of her beginning. She is as little daunted by the Duke or the Queen as she is by the other difficulties which she meets and surmounts with that tremulous calm of self-control which belongs to nerves highly strung; nay, she has even a certain modest pleasure in the society of these potentates, her simple soul meeting them with awe, yet with absolute frankness, making no commonplace attempts at self-assertion. In this particular her humbleness is her strength, and the beautiful unison of a soul so firm and true with the circumstances and habits of a lowly class, brings out all Jeanie's virtues in a clear light of sober independence. Neither her dangers nor the fame and success she has won make for a moment that effect upon her which such experiences would naturally have upon the temperament to which a desire of bettering itself is the chief of human motives. That desire has been the parent of fine deeds, but the mere suggestion of it would have desecrated Jeanie. With a higher and nobler art, the poet has secured her against this danger by her very humility. A poor gentlewoman in the same conditions might have hankered fatally after social elevation, but not so David Deans's daughter. After all, though this climax of her existence is so extra-

ordinary, it is but a little interval in her life, not enough to upset the sweeter balance of her nature, or whisper into her sound brain any extravagance of novel wishes. The accidental and temporary pass away, the perennial and natural remain. Jeanie is greater than rank or gain could make her in the noble simplicity of her nature: and the elevation which is the natural reward of virtue in every fairy tale would be puerile and unworthy of her. The pretty Perdita becomes a princess by every rule of romance, even when she is not a king's daughter to begin with; but Jeanie is above any such primitive recompense of virtue. She is herself always, which is greater than any princess; and there never was a more exquisite touch than that in which, after her outburst of poetic and pathetic eloquence to the Queen, the very overflowing of her earnest and anxious heart, she sinks serene into herself when the crisis is over, and contemplates Richmond Hill as "braw rich feeding for the cows," the innocent dumb friends of her unchanging soul. This is the true moderation of genius. An inferior workman would have kept Jeanie up at the poetic pitch, and lost her in an attempt to prove the elevating influence of high emotion. Scott knew better; his humble maiden of the fields never ceases for a moment to be the best and highest thing she could be made—herself.

And how lifelike and true are all the accessories—grotesque Dumbiedykes, with a touch of pathos in his imploring appeal to "Jeanie, woman!" and the bustling snuff merchant in London, and the genial patriotic Duke, who speaks like Scott himself, and reminds us of him. Just so would the Sheriff have helped his humble country-woman, had his been the office, and brought her to speech of his patroness, and given to the natural eloquence of the heart its fit opportunity. Madge Wildfire and her fantastic group interpose an alien note, but they are of the

nature of conventional and necessary impedimenta, without which no novel could come into being. And who but Scott had ever dreamt of setting before the world such a patriarch as David Deans, with his slow discoursings, his drone of far-off spiritual experience, his dogmatism, and the yearning agony of paternal tenderness with which he sat speechless waiting to know whether his daughter would have the strength to save her sister by a falsehood, though nothing on earth would have made him counsel it? All this is of a strain of simple nature and emotion which we are fain to think above and not below the long-drawn investigations of the analyst who takes humanity to pieces to let us see how its mechanism works. And few historical scenes have ever been put on any canvas like that rapid picture of the Edinburgh mob, in its sudden passion of wrath and vengeance, lit up by the red glare of fire and torch, hanging its victim with a determined judicial gravity and calm, then dispersing as it came together in mystery and silence, untraced and unknown. The *Heart of Mid-Lothian* is not a perfect book. The scenes among the thieves and the apparition of Madge Wildfire are, like the similar scenes in *Guy Mannering*, far-fetched and melodramatic; and the latter part of the book, after Jeanie's marriage, is cumbrous and unnecessary. But, with all its faults, we know not where to find another worthy to be placed beside it; nowhere a more life-like historical scene, or better representation of the old city which has changed so entirely, the old characteristic, stern, and high-handed mob; nor, what is of still greater importance, do we know anywhere a heart or a mission like those of Jeanie, so free from all alloy, so altogether natural yet ideal, so simple and spotless, so unspeakably true. Walter Scott, with all his traditions,—a born aristocrat, a son of the old regime, a Jacobite, a lawyer, and a man of worldly wisdom,—was as far apart as could be conceived from

the cowfeeder's daughter, the rustic milkmaid, Whig, Cameronian, plebeian. No natural sympathy connected these two, except the sympathy of genius with everything that is highest and purest; whence was it, then, that the man whose every thought was so different divined this noble silent soul, by far the finest image of unblemished truth and virtue that his generation had so much as dreamed of? Who can tell? The secret was between him and Heaven. And if this was not creation, then we are incapable even of comprehending what poetic creation means.

We take the *Heart of Mid-Lothian* as one of the best types of Scott's work. It has the characteristic defects of machinery which perhaps haste, and perhaps a certain contempt for the accessories of an art which he had, so to speak, picked up accidentally, and neither studied nor been trained in, betrayed him into. But it has the finest and most complete ideal of any of his books, and its secondary characters give a sufficiently just idea of the wealth of variety and life which was in him—though in this particular several of his other works, such as *Waverley*, *Rob Roy*, and the *Antiquary*, are perhaps superior. In all of these there are the same drawbacks of an unwilling and melodramatic mystery which he evidently considered to be needed for the interest of the tale,—in one Meg Merri-les, in another Madge Wildfire, in the third the fictitious woe and tragedy of the Glenallans. These give occasion for picturesque scenes, and excite the mind of the primitive and unsophisticated reader; but the critic regrets the supposed necessity for their existence, and the Glossins and Dirk Hatteraicks are a sad interruption to our unmingled enjoyment of Dandie Dinmont, and even of Jock Jabos. This weakness disappears more or less whenever Scott has a historical centre from which to work, and which furnishes the necessary tragic elements. It has no

place in *Waverley*, *Old Mortality*, or any of the special historical works. So far as this goes, however, Scott cannot be defended from the charge of carelessness. In fact, he did not care for such secondary matters; he gave up even his heroes to the critical knife with scarcely a sigh. *Waverley* he allowed to be "a sneaking piece of imbecility." He was not careful, like a good workman, of all his proportions, but did what he was modestly aware he could do *con amore*, and left the rest to fate. Laborious workman as he was,—and nothing perhaps has more detracted from Scott's merits among those who look upon the pains of production as necessary, and a total derangement of stomach and liver as becoming adjuncts to a poetic career, than his healthy and straightforward work,—he yet had so much of the caprice of a creator as to divide his care very unequally, bestowing his full attention where he felt it to be most effective, and hurrying over with half contemptuous commonplace the portions which he no doubt supposed were to satisfy the commonplace portion of his audience. In one part, accordingly, the picture is set forth with the most affectionate particularity; in another, though his eye for picturesque effects was so keen that he could not miss them, it is dashed upon the careless page with a conviction that only the easily satisfied will linger upon it, and that for them no special trouble was necessary: a method which certainly does not come up to the requirements of the modern "conscientious" standard.

From 1814 to 1825 Scott was at the height of a glorious and prosperous career. The *Lord of the Isles* had been a disappointment, but he had shaken off the momentary fret with all the more ease that *Waverley* by this time had moved the world to enthusiasm and he had fairly entered upon his new path. After this all seemed to go well with him. During these crowning



years of his life and genius he wrote book after book, one more warmly received, more enthusiastically admired, than another. He bought land, laying field to field; he built and ornamented, and dressed out to his heart's desire with every nick-nack he could think of, the house of Abbotsford; he was fêted and made much of wherever he went, princes and poets conspiring which would do him the greatest honour; he became a baronet; a stream of perpetual worshippers flowed from all the corners of the earth to his house. Never was there a more prosperous, wealthy, and joyful career, so far as the world was aware. That all the time below this he was struggling to bolster up a fictitious business, to pay accommodation bills, to meet the continually recurring crises of commercial difficulty, nobody knew except the booksellers, with whom he was inextricably involved, the extraordinary happy-go-lucky firm of the Ballantynes, and the almost equally rash and more high-handed Constable. The system of business carried on by the two brothers of the printing office seems incredible; and that anything so wild could have existed with an outward aspect of success for years is unaccountable. One partner correcting proofs in a snug room apart, while the printing house swung on in space as fortune pleased, the other meeting every new demand with a new bill,—only a farce could do justice to this most tragic career, which involved despair and suffering unspeakable to the one nobly honest and honourable workman who stood among them maintaining all with his right hand. That Scott should have allowed such a system to go on is another of the points in the matter which is beyond explanation; but it is very evident that he did so, and though he was himself fully conscious of the terrible drain upon him, no one else was, and his purchases and expenditure seemed to the outside world reasonable and natural enough.

They were, so far as we can see, perfectly reasonable, had there not been that private drain behind, that miserable mystery of the undisclosed partnership; and everybody concerned seems to have had an extraordinary power of putting this out of sight, concealing the inevitable as it ripened towards destruction, and living as if it were not perfectly certain that sooner or later an end must come.

Before this end came, however, we repeat, Scott had not only a most full and animated, but a happy life. Though there are times in which the soul is ready to say with Francesca that the recollection of happiness is the greatest of woes, yet on the other hand the mind demands, during our earthly career—between the early struggles of the beginning and the unfailing sorrows of age—that a man should have his day. It is a demand we make both for ourselves and others with the strenuous force of almost indignation. So long as that has been, humanity, no way over-estimating its own sad chances, acquiesces with a sombre content in the clouds and darkness which come after. And Sir Walter (as he now was) had his day. He got the desire of his heart. He was happy in his life, in his surroundings, in his children, in the home he loved. Why his desire for that home, which he would so fain have left to his son, and his son's son after him, should have been made the subject of invariable censure, we confess we are unable to divine. He would rather have been a Scotch laird than the author of *Waverley*, people say, never thinking that one of his great charms as a man was his noble modesty about this authorship of *Waverley*, his genial and gentle way of ignoring his own greatness and setting every humble scribbler at his ease. He, if the world would but admit it, was always Walter Scott to himself, and not the author of *Waverley*. He was a man, a kindly Scot, the father of young Walter, the son of a race every man of

which would have had a footing on Tweedside if he could, rather than any other advancement. He was the most liberal, hospitable, princely of men. He liked to keep open house, to shed bounty all around him; receiving was little in his way, but giving much. Even had he stood upon his genius more than it was in him to do, he was of a nature which revolted at patronage, which could never with pleasure have played the lion in great men's houses, or sustained the bestowal of those flatteries which, like all alms, are more or less humiliating. If the world chose to stare and applaud, let it come then to his never closed door and pay its homage if it would. The Sheriff, the laird, the kindly master of the soil, could there shake off all exaggerations, and make the flatterers, if any good were in them, honest friends without wounding their pride by a harsh refusal of their worship. And leave it to his children after him—who does not wish to do so? It is the most natural, and, whenever it succeeds, the most laudable of desires. Why Sir Walter should have been upbraided with his Abbotsford we have never been able to divine. What he was really to be reproached with was that secret partnership which drained away his heart's blood, which he treated like the fabled ostrich, thrusting his head into the sand that he might not see the danger.

In his exculpation on this point it is impossible to say more than that there is something in the flood of commercial affairs which seems to carry even those to the manner born, away from all their moorings; miraculous tidings-over, sudden fluctuations from loss to gain, hair's-breadth 'scapes which are intoxicating, and in their excitement seem to obliterate all sounder sense, and create an impression that just so, in a whirl of miracle and prodigies,—anxieties that are made almost attractive by the intense pleasure of relief,—the adventurers may

go on for ever and always evade the conclusion. Those who are thus deceived invariably find that the conclusion at last cannot be avoided—and so did Scott. Yet there was a time when his life was very happy, and nobody suspected that the famous author whose works brought him to all appearance as much as he could wish for—a Fortunatus's purse always refilled—had any anxiety at all to cloud his career and remind him that his happiness might soon come to an end. We must add the following little sketch of the way in which he spent his days. It is somewhat personal to Lockhart, the narrator, and embraced his own experiences as well as those of the subject of his biography:—

“At Chiefswood (a cottage near Abbotsford) my wife and I spent the summer and autumn of 1821, the first of several seasons which will ever dwell in my memory as the happiest of my life. We were near enough Abbotsford to partake as often as we liked of its brilliant society, yet could do so without being exposed to the worry and exhaustion of spirit which the daily reception of newcomers entailed upon all the family except Sir Walter himself. But in truth even he was not always proof against the annoyances connected with such a style of open-housekeeping. Even his temper sank sometimes under the solemn applauses of learned dulness, the rapid raptures of painted and periwigged dowagers, the horse-leech avidity with which underbred foreigners urged their questions, and the pompous simper of condescending magnates. When sore beset at home in this way he would every now and then discover that he had some very particular business to attend to on an outlying part of his estate, and, craving the indulgence of his guests overnight, appear at the cabin in the glen before its inhabitants were astir in the morning. The clatter of Sybil Grey's hoofs, the yelping of Mustard and Spice, and his own joyous shout of *reveille* under our windows, were the signal that he had burst his toils and meant for that day to take his ‘ease in his inn.’ On descending he was to be found seated, with all his dogs and ours about him, under a spreading ash that overshadowed half the bank behind the cottage and the park, pointing the edge of his woodman's axe for himself, and listening to Tom Purdie's lecture touching the plantation that most needed thinning. After breakfast he would take possession of a dining-room upstairs and write a chapter

of the *Pirate*, and then, having made up and despatched his parcel for Mr. Ballantyne, away to join Purdie wherever the foresters were at work, and sometimes to labour among them, until it was time either to rejoin his own party at Abbotsford or the quiet circle of the cottage. When his guests were few and friendly, he often made them come over and meet him at Chiefswood in a body towards evening; and surely he never appeared to more amiable advantage than when helping his young people with their little arrangements upon such occasions. He was ready with all sorts of devices to supply the wants of a narrow establishment; he used to delight particularly in sinking the wine in a well under the brae ere he went out, and hauling up the basket just before dinner was announced—this primitive process being, he said, what he had always practised when a young housekeeper, and in his opinion far superior in its results to any application of ice; and in the same spirit, whenever the weather was sufficiently genial, he voted for dining out of doors altogether, which at once got rid of the inconvenience of very small rooms, and made it natural and easy for the gentlemen to help the ladies, so that the paucity of servants went for nothing.” . . .

Thus Scott lived among the woods which were so dear to him, to which he would escape when the babble of adulation or the endless talk of books, that every visitor no doubt thought necessary conversation for the great author, got too much for him. If he had passed his days in a frenzy of composition, perhaps we should have thought more of him. During that summer, his son-in-law goes on to inform us, one of the most faithful friends of his life, William Erskine,—a man whom Scott “respected, trusted, and loved, much as an affectionate husband does the wife who gave him her heart in her youth, and thinks his thoughts rather than her own in the evening of life,” and who on his side had “merged all his literary ambition, active and aspiring, at the outset” in Scott and his works,—was with him, specially aiding with his local knowledge in the locality and descriptions of the *Pirate*, which happened to be the book then on the stocks. This was the man who saw the first chapters

of *Waverley* and thought them dull, and dismissed them to that drawer in the cabinet where Scott found them at last among his fishing tackle. But one mistake of this kind may be made by any man, and it does not seem to have lessened Scott's confidence in his life-long friend. As he wrote, the manuscript was handed over to this tried and loved, though not always infallible adviser. "Sir Walter used to give him at breakfast the pages he had written that morning; and very commonly, while he was again at work in his study, Erskine would walk over to Chiefswood that he might have the pleasure of reading them aloud to my wife and me under our favourite tree. . . . I cannot paint the pride and delight with which he acquitted himself on these occasions."

Thus surrounded with people who loved him—not one of his workmen or retainers but was the friend of half a lifetime at least,—Tom Purdie, loitering about the plantations, being no less devoted and faithful than William Erskine reading the manuscript with glistening eyes—Scott lived for many happy years. He turned no pilgrims from his doors, but entertained with his best every stranger that appeared, pouring forth in genial talk the germs of a hundred novels, never thrifty of anecdote or tale,—the born story-teller of his age, more delightful by word of mouth than even in print. If such a gift is not a worthy one, then all the instincts of the race are at fault, and one of the chief delights of life a mistake. But Scott was too genuine for any pose of authorship or theatrical pomp of genius. His art was to conceal his art, and persuade if possible all his listeners that they were as good as he. No doubt Shakspeare did the same; and had we a detailed biography of him, we should feel the absence of the fine frenzy, the throes and convulsions, which ought to accompany the birth of poetry. Nobody certainly will find them in Scott; but at the same time

we have but to turn to the sad musings of his last years to feel that his work and his utterance, so seeming easy in the flush of his strength and fame, were anything but matters of indifferent routine to him. At a moment of miserable anticipation, when he thought nothing better than to be overwhelmed in the flood of pecuniary troubles, it is thus he contemplates his position with a sadness almost beyond words:—"For myself, if things go badly in London, the magic wand of the Unknown will be shivered in his grasp. He must then, faith, be termed the Too-well-Known. The feast of fancy will be over with the feeling of independence. He will no longer have the delight of waking in the morning with bright ideas in his mind, hasten to commit them to paper, and count them monthly, as the means of planting such scaurs and purchasing such wastes, replacing dreams of fiction by other prospective visions of walks by

"Fountain heads, and pathless groves ;  
Places which pale passion loves.'"

Thus Scott separated in his mind the happy idea of carrying out one set of dreams through another, the "visioned walks," by the "bright ideas," the "feast of fancy" from that "general knowledge that an author is working for his bread," which he describes as "degrading him and his productions in the public eye," and reducing him into "the second rank of estimation." This, he says, "is a bitter thought, and if tears start at it let them flow."

In the meantime, for eleven brilliant years the stream ran on. Nobody will say that the *Waverley Novels* are equal in merit, or expect from any series that it should be so. Early in Scott's career occurred the partial failure of the *Black Dwarf*, one of the least attractive of his productions; and though he made up his lost way in

*Old Mortality* which accompanied it, yet it was a bold undertaking to affront, as he did in that tale, the prejudices of Scotland with such a view of the forefathers of whom the nation, even when it had outgrown them, was still proud. He made what was very much a fresh start and new beginning in *Ivanhoe*, a book which never can be ranked with his highest achievements, but yet never, we think, can lose its ground as one of the most delightful of historical romances, doubtful though their witchery has got to be. As to this division of his work, however, we must remember that he was the first in the field, that modern historical romances were not in his day, or at least had not risen above the level of *The Scottish Chiefs* and *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. Nothing could be more picturesque and animated than the panorama of brilliant and highly-coloured mediæval life thus made to pass before us; and in the companion romances of the *Betrothed* and the *Talisman* there is a higher quality, a tragic element, which no true critic will undervalue. It is, however, upon Scott's early studies of the life of his own country, and what we have ventured to call his revelation of that country to the other nations of the earth, that his fame will always rest. Taken all in all, no such unbroken line of worthy and often brilliant work has been left by any other workman in this region of literature. They have done more to brighten the world, to soothe the weary, to elevate the standard of general, and what, if the reader pleases, we may call commonplace excellence, than any other works of fiction the world has ever seen. Not a word in them all has ever insinuated evil or palliated dishonour. Truth so honest and so spontaneous that it is unconscious of any merit, yet sometimes, as in the case of *Jeanie Deans*, already discussed, rising to such a heroic height as poetry has rarely if ever attempted, is the very atmosphere in them.



And though good sense and judgment could not be absent from the wholesome and natural man whom Walter Scott delighted to draw, the loftier qualities of generosity and chivalrous devotion were never wanting. When Evan Dhu looks round the fatal court at Carlisle, and asks sternly "if the Saxon gentlemen are laughing" at his proposal to bring six men of the clan—himself the first—to die for Vich Ian Vohr, is there any heart that does not swell with a pang of sympathy? Throughout these books, the losing cause is that to which men stand with unbounded courage; the friend in trouble is he to whom they stick with kindness more sure than a brother's. There is no lack of the caution, the prudence, the guile, that has been long said to be characteristic of Scotland; but even Cuddie Headrigg, the typical Scottish peasant, chary of trouble, and easily persuaded to his own interest, snatches up a gun and follows his master at the supreme moment, indifferent at once to danger and to Jenny. These are the common people of Scott's multitudinous creations.

His heroes are poor creatures, not in sentiment, but from the inherent disadvantages of their position, and the difficulty which he, in common with most other poets, has found in giving substance to the youthful ideal; and his sentiment, if always genuine, is too straightforward and simple to afford much ground for the complications which a more sophisticated intelligence loves. Passion has but little to do with his themes; when it appears, it is the passion of patriotism, of love for a cause rather than for an individual. Love is to him dutiful, tender, devoted, but never an over-mastering emotion for which the world would be well lost. When he began to write novels he was no longer in the sentimental period, and perhaps this has had some effect in sobering his tone; but nothing which was beyond a brave man's power of

control was congenial to Scott's thoughts. Only in humour does he give full and boundless scope to his fancy. He has his eyes opened in this way to everything that crosses his sphere of vision. Eccentricities of the vulgar type,—beings out of tune with life, creations eldritch and abnormal, have little attraction for him; but all the whims and twists of tender nature, the turn this way or that way of the mind and fancy, the individual lights that throw variety upon every scene, the fun, the jest, the endless links of feeling and of folly, the entanglements of the serious and the ridiculous, the droll aspects which gravity itself puts on, the ludicrous predicaments of circumstances,—these were never lost upon him. And no man has ever seen with more genial vision that mingling of noble qualities with absurd weaknesses which humourists love. Not like Sterne, working out with lingering and delicate detail every trait of character, and framing perfection in graceful oddities of habit, old-world dress and custom, and primitive sincerity, open to every imposition; but rather with a luminous perception of every man "ganging his ain gait," and all the wonderful curves and diversities of path through which he does so, and an amused affectionate sense of the special foibles, broken bits of folly and wisdom, obstinacies, prejudices, absurdities, which envelop here and there the best heart and nature. His insight here was unbounded, for he knew the race he set forth in all their varieties, and had seen below the surface all their quips and cranks of being from his earliest days, being always an unconscious observer, and above all a friend and lover of his countrymen and humankind.

His novels brought Scott more money than literature had ever brought,—money destined, as has been seen, with a delightful self-delusion and refinement, to "plant scaurs," not to increase his dignity and importance and

make a Tweedside laird of him, according to the version of the vulgar. If it did not turn his noble head to be thus able to win money at his will, it did turn the heads of all connected with him in the business built upon the workings of his brain. The booksellers seem to have considered the fountain inexhaustible, and to have calculated as upon solid capital on his power of producing what the public wanted, and meeting every vagary of its taste and favour. Never was there such a romance of trade as that which these dazzled and intoxicated men carried on at his expense, always confident that some new effort on his part would clear away every difficulty. When a new book was ready, a jovial dinner or supper was the first preliminary; and after the fun had begun to wax fast and furious, the guests, all intent and holding fast by their wits for the emergency, notwithstanding claret and toddy, were allowed to know the name, and perhaps to have a chapter read from the proofs, James Ballantyne being the prophet who communicated these oracles to man. This strangest and most unbusiness-like of printers was, indeed, Scott's interpreter in more ways than one. He spent his life over the hasty manuscripts and proofs. He was the critic, if not in words, yet by involuntary revelations, of the feeling which it was his mission to sound and fathom out of doors—a sort of literary henchman, as entirely devoted to his chief as Evan Dhu to Fergus MacIvor. Unfortunately, Constable, though a better man of business, and with some real foundation to go upon, was not much wiser than his coadjutors. He too became excited by the possession of this strange slave of genius, who went on at his magic loom while other men slept, and threatened to fill the world with those glittering webs which brightened everything around—the face of the country, and the aspect of society, and the balance at the bank. When, after so much wild

trading upon credit, so many rash and unwise speculations in literature, and daring play with danger, the shock came at last, and the Edinburgh printing house and publishing office came down together, their ruin precipitated by the failure of an English correspondent and agent, Constable could not believe that the name he had to conjure withal was not enough to overcome all his foes. He wanted, it is said, to go to the Bank of England and borrow from one hundred to two hundred thousand pounds on the security of his possession of the author of *Waverley*—mortgaging, as it were, this estate which was to him the most certain and inexhaustible of all quarries and mines of gold.

It is a proof at once of Scott's extraordinary power over the imaginations of those surrounding him, and of the bewildering excitement and fever heat at which one brilliant success after another held them, that such an idea could have entered into the mind of mortal man. Scott was to these men what the subject spirit of his own story was to Michael Scott; but with this difference, that whereas the Wizard was embarrassed by the too rapid accomplishment of all his wishes, and had soon no mountain to be cleft in twain or sea sand to be twisted into ropes, Constable and the Ballantynes felt that they had nothing to do but to pass on to the public the constant product of his toil, the more the better, and build upon the endless increase of a power which they did not attempt to gauge, which they never seem to have thought of as likely to be affected by distress or anxiety or pain, like that of other men. Had he, one is tempted to think, kept clear of these knights-errant of the bookselling trade,—had he been in the hands of a Blackwood or a Murray, born to success, what a different end had been that of the Magician, the great improvisatore of an entranced and wondering age! Then had he built his

towers and planted his scaurs in peace, then had his charmed doors stood open for the comfort and solace of all pilgrims, then had the world applauded all his gentle ambitions, and sworn by its right hand that never was nobler issue of a poet's labours than that poetic castle and those beloved woods on Tweedside. But when the spectres of bankruptcy and ruin came, the real defaulters sank into insignificance, and Scott had all to pay, not only in his purse and person, but in his fame, in his favourite pursuits, in Abbotsford and all its hospitalities and hopes. We cannot but think that there is no circumstance in his life more cruel than that which has made so legitimate a desire, so habitual and blameless an ambition, his reproach and almost shame. Abbotsford would not have ruined him had not trade swept all this recompense of his labours into its devouring current. And he might have tranquilly enjoyed all the honours he loved but for his tender-heartedness towards his old schoolfellow, but for his loyal faithfulness to the "trade" which for years had filled his life with the hazards and excitements of a failing fight.

The end of this wonderful career is too well known to demand repetition. When the ruin of the booksellers was no longer to be averted, and when his own astonished family and the larger circle of the world out of doors learnt how Scott was involved with them, he met the downfall with a heroism which nothing in the history of literature has ever equalled. "Nobody in the end can lose a penny by me," is almost the first comment he makes when the terrible news falls on his ears. Nothing can be more soberly sad, and yet brave, than the tone of his journal, though now and then it rises into a momentary wondering appeal to heaven and earth, or drops into a musing melancholy over his lost fortunes, which is so tragically calm that it is impossible to read it unmoved

“Poor Will Laidlaw! poor Tom Purdie,” he cries, “such news will wring your hearts, and many a poor fellow’s besides, to whom my prosperity was daily bread.” Then, with that immediate return to the thought of something to be done, which shows the metal of the courageous soul, he sets himself to what is before him. Now that he has at last fairly faced the situation, he will have no tidings-over, no fresh borrowings. “I feel quite composed and determined to labour,” he says; and when he records “a sleepless night” and a body out of sorts—“*Mais pourtant cultivons notre jardin.*” The public favour is my only lottery. I have long enjoyed the foremost prize, and something in my breast tells me my evil genius will not overtake me if I stand by myself.” . . . Then he adds, with a break in his valiant voice, “I have walked my last on the domains I have planted; sate the last time in the house I have built. But death would have taken them from me if misfortune had spared them. My poor people whom I loved so well! There is just another dice to turn up against me in this run of ill luck—i.e. if I should break my magic wand in the fall from this elephant, and lose my popularity. Then Woodstock and Boney may both go to the papermaker, and I may take to smoking cigars and drinking grog. In prospect of absolute ruin I wonder if they would let me leave the Court of Session? I would like, methinks, to go abroad ‘and lay my bones far from the Tweed.’ I will not yield without a fight for it. It is odd when I set myself to work doggedly, as Dr. Johnson would say, I am exactly the same man as I ever was—neither low-spirited nor distrustful. In prosperous times I have sometimes felt my fancy and powers of language flag, but adversity is to me at heart a tonic and a bracer; the fountain is awakened from its inmost recesses. . . . Poor Mr. Pole, the harper, has sent to offer me £500 or £600, probably his all. But I will

involve no friend, rich or poor." . . . "O Invention, rouse thyself" (he cries after this); "may man be kind, may God be propitious!" . . . Nothing more heartrending was ever put in print. He was fifty-four and had been ill, and was pulled up suddenly with a shock which might have broken a less valiant spirit in the midst of his easy and happy life. For a day or two even his steady hand was paralysed; but presently began again with something more near passion than had ever moved him before. One thing affects him pitifully, the most painful of all: "The worst is I never know when I am right or wrong; and Ballantyne, who does know in some degree, will fear to tell me." Who, indeed, in such a crisis would have had the heart to say to him that his gift had forsaken him, and his spell was over?

He goes on to say that what he would advise a client to do in such a circumstance would be to have himself made a bankrupt. "But for this," he cries, "in a court of honour I would deserve to lose my spurs. No; if they will permit me I will be their vassal for life, and dig in the mine of my imagination to find diamonds (or what may sell for such) to make good my engagements, not to enrich myself. And this from no reluctance to be called the Insolvent, which I probably am, but because I will not put out of the power of my creditors the resources, mental or literary, which yet remain in me." What an enterprise was this! to dig in the mine of imagination—with the thought coming always back to him, a terrible possibility, that the mine was exhausted—for thousands and thousands of pounds with which to pay the debts of a trading firm. But Scott did not shrink from it. "Give me my popularity (*an awful postulate!*), and all my present difficulties shall be a joke in four years," he cries. If he wrote too easily, too lightly, out of the fulness of his heart before, it was with tragic earnestness that he

betook himself now to that quarry which, alas! was not inexhaustible. *Woodstock* was the book he was writing at the moment—that and the *Life of Napoleon*. The one produced for him—that being the chief matter to be thought of in this crisis—£8000; the other £18,000. Between them they were little more than a year's work. The *Life of Napoleon*, if not an extraordinary effort of genius, has at least held its place in literature among the many revelations more instructive and graphic of that wonderful life. And *Woodstock*, too, found its niche if not in the highest rank at least on a level more dignified than that of any other existing novelist; while in the introduction to the *Chronicles of the Canongate*, which followed, there was much that was worthy of his best days, and one heartrending picture of a paralytic invalid, in which his own end was shadowed forth. This was followed by the *Fair Maid of Perth*, *Anne of Geierstein*, and the *Tales of a Grandfather*, one of the books which has achieved a gentle immortality worthy of its name.

But all these productions were as nothing to the far nobler work, the chapter of heroic life, which Scott was inscribing through all those weary days in the annals of his country. His lonely anguish, his determined hope, his chill of doubting, lest perhaps his magic should have failed him; his work, never relinquished, sped forward day by day with resolute patience, with stern subdual of all the lingering thoughts and regrets that struggled in—often not satisfying him, often perplexing him with apprehensions, but never slackened;—this is a story such as no man had ever lived and told. The bosom contracts, the “climbing sorrow” mounts into the reader's throat, as the wonderful record passes before his eyes. It does not give any adequate expression to our feelings to say, as Lockhart does with just pride, that in two years this gigantic struggle had produced £40,000 with which to satisfy the creditors'



claims—which indeed was a miracle—but a poor miracle in comparison with the worker himself who performed it. He might have saved himself all this, and gone free without even the loss of his estate, which was secured by his son's marriage settlement, but that he would not deprive his creditors of "the resources, mental and literary," on which he thought they had a right to calculate. This it is, and not the gains, which makes the last chapter of Scott's life one of the most noble known to man. Those musing reminiscences of Crystal Croftangry, so like himself, yet so subdued, so sadly prophetic, might have been written in his blood; and when we remember, which by this time the reader seldom does, the darkness and sorrow and humiliation, yet noble pride and independence out of which they came, it is hard to read them without tears.

The struggle was heroic for all concerned. The servants stood by their master with a faithfulness which is rarely seen. The butler became man of all work, protesting with tears that he would not leave his master, wages or no wages. The dignified coachman and his pet horses turned to, like their master, and worked on the farm. When Scott saw this sight a broken cry of pleasure and pain came from him. "Auld Pepe's whistling at his darg," he said. "The honest fellow said a yoking in a deep field would do baith him and the blackies good. If things get round with me, easy shall be Pepe's cushion!" Thus even the serving men were inspired, and nothing could show more clearly the brotherhood and tender friendship that united the household.

But labour and anxiety and sorrow are bad companions. When the pressure began to lighten a little, the overstrained brain at last gave way. He had several slight fits of paralysis in rapid succession, and at last was obliged almost completely to lay down the pen, though never entirely. He went to Italy for his health, and roamed

about with lack-lustre countenance, yet now and then a gleam of dying light, all other anxieties at last verging in that of getting back to Tweedside, to lay his bones by the beloved river ; for, some time before a bountiful and tender heaven had breathed upon his worn brain the kind delusion that he had paid off all his debts, and was once more a free man. The other mercy vouchsafed to him was that he lived to get safely home, and there died in September 1832, sixty-one years old. The last incident in his life was a characteristic one. After one of the broken slumbers of weakness, he awoke, and starting up suddenly in his chair, exclaimed,—

“ ‘ This is sad idleness ; I shall forget what I have been thinking of if I don’t set it down now. Take me into my own room, and fetch the keys of my desk.’ He repeated this so earnestly that we could not refuse. His daughter went into his study, opened his writing desk, and laid paper and pens in the usual order ; and I then moved him through the hall, and into the spot where he had always been accustomed to work. When the chair was placed at the desk, and he found himself in the old position, he smiled and thanked us, and said, ‘ Now give me my pen and leave me for a little to myself.’ Sophia put the pen into his hand, and he endeavoured to close his fingers upon it, but they refused their office—it dropped upon the paper. He sank back among his pillows—silent tears rolling down his cheeks ; but, composing himself, by-and-by motioned to me to wheel him out of doors again. Laidlaw met us at the porch and took his turn at the chair. Sir Walter after a little while again dropped into slumber. When he was awaking Laidlaw said to me, ‘ Sir Walter has had a little repose.’ ‘ No, Willie,’ said he, ‘ no repose for Sir Walter but in the grave.’ The tears again rushed from his eyes. ‘ Friends,’ said he, don’t let me expose myself ; get me to bed—that’s the only place.”

Thus the long tragedy came to an end. A sadder yet more noble tale was never written. There have been hesitations about the continuance of the extraordinary fame which his own generation bestowed upon Scott with such fulness and unanimity as fell to the lot of no other man ; but there has been no hesitation about the man

and the life thus ended. It may, however, strike the reader, as it does the writer, that there is a certain want both of generosity and justice in the praise sometimes bestowed upon himself at the expense of his work. We may afford to waive that work aside, and give our careless plaudits to the man, celebrating his "health" and "sanity," as the jargon goes, at the expense of his genius, when we find anything worthy to place beside that work, or which can give us half the genial crowd of honest friends, the animated faces, the unforgotten converse, the humour and the wisdom and the noble sentiment, the manly honour and womanly truth, the free and delightful play of fancy which we find in it. Among the agencies that have made Scotland, once so rude and poor, the most prosperous of countries, it is injustice indeed to exclude this one—the warm and tender and living portraiture of her characteristic features, which first made her the acquaintance, the kindly friend and hostess, the admiration of an astonished world. We know no other writer who has done for his country what Sir Walter did for his, unless we seek that writer in a rank above the highest which we dare claim for our beloved romancer and historian—in the larger sphere of Shakspeare, or in the narrow but intensest circle of Dante. We do not claim for him a place beside the poet of England or him of Florence. But being his superiors, they are the only names, which, on their higher level, are his equals in this which he did for his country and for his race.

WALTER SCOTT, born 1771 ; died 1832.

Published Translations, Bürger's, Lenore, etc., 1796.

———Goetz von Berlichingen, 1799.

Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border, 1802.

Lay of the Last Minstrel, 1805.

Marmion, 1808.

The Lady of the Lake, 1810.

Published *The Vision of Don Roderick*, 1811.

Rokeby  
*Bridal of Triermain* } 1813.  
*Lord of the Isles*, 1814.  
*Field of Waterloo*, 1815.  
*Harold the Dauntless*, 1817.

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*Waverley*, 1814.

*Guy Mannering*, 1815.

*The Antiquary*, 1816.

*The Black Dwarf—Old Mortality*, 1816.

*Rob Roy*  
*The Heart of Midlothian* } 1818.

*The Bride of Lammermoor—Legend of Montrose*,  
 1819

*Ivanhoe*, 1820.

*The Monastery*  
*The Abbot* } 1820.

*Kenilworth*  
*The Pirate* } 1821.

*The Fortunes of Nigel*, 1822.

*Peveril of the Peak*  
*Quentin Durward* } 1823.  
*St. Ronan's Well*

*Redgauntlet*, 1824.

*Tales of the Crusaders (Betrothed and Talisman)*,  
 1825.

*Woodstock*, 1826.

*Chronicles of the Canongate (Two Drovers, Surgeon's Daughter, Highland Widow)*, 1828.

*The Fair Maid of Perth*, 1828.

*Anne of Geierstein*, 1829.

*Count Robert of Paris—Castle Dangerous*, 1831.

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*Life of Napoleon*, 1827.

*Tales of a Grandfather*.

*History of Scotland (Lardner's Encyclopædia)*.

*Letters on Demonology*.

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JOHN LEYDEN, born 1775 ; died 1811.

Published *Scenes of Infancy*, 1802.

## CHAPTER IV.

THOMAS CAMPBELL: AND THE LESSER LIGHTS  
IN SCOTLAND.

THE name of another poet, celebrated in his own immediate days with an admiration which has much failed him now, must be added to the Northern group before we proceed to the somewhat younger band who had risen upon the horizon before Wordsworth had yet gained anything like a due acknowledgment, and while Scott was still in his poetical stage. Thomas Campbell was the son of an Argyllshire family with some pretensions to gentility, which, however, had faded sadly before his day. His father was a merchant whose trade had been ruined by the American war, and it was in a very poor and limited home that the young poet was brought up. He was born in July 1777, and was therefore very near the age of the greater poets, his contemporaries. Very seldom in the history of time has a single decade proved so fruitful in genius as that which began in 1770 with Wordsworth. Campbell began his life with all the promise of excellence which might have ushered in a much greater man. He had, notwithstanding the poverty of his parents, the best education Glasgow could furnish, and distinguished himself much as a scholar. He seems almost to have lisped in numbers, and wrote verses which were very correct, and not without merit, when he was ten years old.

He grew up, however, into a somewhat uncertain and shift-y youth, having no profession, and a temperament such as has always been called poetical,—a sensitive, irritable, easily-wounded and intensely-feeling nature, which could not exist without emotion. The chief thing known about him in his early days is his susceptibility to friendship. The long and not very interesting biography of him which we owe to Dr. Beattie is principally made up of equally long and scarcely more interesting letters to his young friends, in which the attachment is more apparent than the genius. His first poem was suggested, we are told, by the gentle elegance of the *Pleasures of Memory*, which he read in the stern island of Mull when languishing there in a tutorship, and cultivating everything that reminded him of scenes more genial. These were still the days when the pleasures of an abstract quality of the mind seemed, to a dutiful intelligence trained in poetical traditions, to be a fine subject for a poem. Campbell had already a reputation as “the Pope” of Glasgow—specially arising from a prize poem entitled an *Essay on the Origin of Evil*, which was thought to be framed on the model of the *Essay on Man*—when he began his great work. It is to be feared that there are comparatively few who think it a great work now; but not only were his own youthful companions penetrated by admiration for it, as was natural, but all Edinburgh, always sensitive to a new national distinction, received it and its young author with enthusiasm. He came thither, after trial of various situations as tutor, though only nineteen, in 1797, and by good fortune got into the hands of people who could befriend him at least in the way of good company and social advancement. He had his manuscript in his pocket, and was a handsome lad, propitiating strangers by his good looks; and his story was one to interest a literary community. He had

brought the best character and auguries of future fame from his University, and he had all the confidence in his poem which it became a young poet to have, and felt, could he ever get it printed, that the world would be at his feet. The friends to whom it had been confided in manuscript were of the same opinion, and though he had to wait and suffer various disappointments in the meantime, yet the *Pleasures of Hope* was published when he was only twenty-one, and was received with instant favour.

Scott was as yet but a humble and voiceless young advocate, and had not ventured upon so much as *Lenore* when this new poet appeared. Henry Brougham was a youth of twenty whom young Campbell hoped to see "an ornament of his country;" and the *Edinburgh Review* and all the commotion it raised were still among the secrets of the future. It was, therefore, rather the unawakened Edinburgh upon which Burns had burst like a meteor, confusing and disturbing all laws and prejudices,—the Edinburgh over which the Man of Feeling still reigned, and where Dugald Stewart, bland and philosophical, and Alison, the well-bred Episcopalian divine, with his elegant canons of taste, gave a tone of dignified calm to society,—than that Edinburgh which we have been discussing, the brilliant town from which all the skirmishers of literature were frisking forth, and whose sober quiet had given way to a rule of fiery frolic, dash, and daring, unrivalled in the world of literature,—to which we are now for a moment brought back. There was no poet then in those quiet days, nor any critics to speak of; a mild and feeble *Edinburgh Magazine* was the sole representative of periodical literature, and no public defiance of the old established ways of poetry and authorship had yet been given in the gray metropolis of the North. Campbell's first patron was a Dr. Anderson, spoken of as

the author of *Lives of the British Poets*, whose name is not to be found even in the *Encyclopædias*. He was a friend of Leyden, who has been already referred to, and of Grahame, the gentle singer of the *Sabbath*; but neither of these soft-voiced minor minstrels had as yet made their appearance in print. There are some wonderful stories about the poverty and depression amid which the *Pleasures of Hope* was written, but most of these seem to be somewhat apocryphal. The young poet's rapid changes from melancholy to hope; his declaration at one moment that "there are days when I can't abide to walk in the sunshine, and when I would almost rather be shot than come within the sight of any man or be spoken to by any mortal;" and at another, his cheerful adoption of his friends' hopes that he would become "a great man on the strength of a single poem," and description, "made with great animation," of "the fashion in which he would live, through what countries he would travel, and all the grand things he would do," are nothing wonderful in the history of an imaginative youth, prone to sentiment, easily up and easily down. But he had not, as some of his contemporaries had, to wait long for general recognition. His first poem brought him immediate fame. "Public curiosity having been studiously kept awake for some months, the demand for copies was unprecedented. Anticipation, which had run very high as to its merits, was fully justified by the perusal; and when the youth of the poet was considered, the mature strength and beauty of the poem struck every reader with surprise. He had suddenly emerged, it was said, like a star from his obscurity, and, young as he was, had thrown a new and increasing light over the literary horizon of his country." As an individual instance of this prompt favour, we may quote the following incident, showing how Dr Gregory, one of the great physicians who have



reigned in dynasties in Edinburgh, had his attention directed to the poem :—

“Calling one morning at the publishers, he took up the new poem just sent in from the printers. ‘Ah, what have we here?’ said he, ‘the *Pleasures of Hope*.’ He looked carelessly between the uncut leaves, until, observing a passage that struck him forcibly, he turned to the beginning and never moved from the side of the counter till he had finished the first part. He then, in the most emphatic terms, said : ‘Mr. Mundell, this is poetry ! where is the author to be found ? I will call upon him immediately.’ From Mr. Mundell’s shop Dr. Gregory went to attend a consultation ; but finding the hour was long past, and that he had unwittingly given to poetry the time meant for his patient, he called on the author and left a note for him expressing his admiration of the poem, and requesting the pleasure of his acquaintance.”

Another story is told of Campbell’s introduction to Edinburgh society, of a still more gratifying character. Scott is said to have invited him to dinner with the view of making him acquainted with his own circle of wits and men of letters. The young poet was somewhat surprised, perhaps a little piqued, to be introduced to none of those celebrities, most of them older, richer, and more confident than himself ; for he divined by the talk going on at the table that he was surrounded by men of distinction. He was, however, soon indemnified for this apparent neglect, and the incident furnishes us with a pleasant scene. It is easy to imagine the curiosity, and interest, and mortification, and suspicious pride of the easily-offended youth, with all the warm susceptibility to affront and slight which belonged at once to his youth, his species, and his nation, sitting eager-eyed, not knowing whether to be angry or pleased, amid this brilliant circle, where he was the only stranger.

“Where Scott presided (says the formal narrative) the conversation was sure to be edifying as well as pleasant. At length, when the cloth was removed and the loyal toasts were disposed of, Scott stood up, and with a handsome and complimentary notice of

the new poem, proposed a bumper to the author of the *Pleasures of Hope*. 'The poem,' he added, 'is in the hands of all our friends, and the poet,' pointing to a young gentleman on his right, 'I have now the honour of introducing to you.' The toast was received with enthusiasm. The eyes of the company were fixed on the young poet, and although taken by surprise he acknowledged the compliment with so much taste and good feeling, that, after hearing him speak, no one felt surprised that so young a man had written the *Pleasures of Hope*."

This touch was like the ever generous and friendly soul of the magician, far greater than Campbell, who had not as yet found his divining wand, nor was aware of his own power. The youth thus introduced made his way into all the Edinburgh drawing-rooms with a halo of youthful glory about his head. He was received like a son in the house of Alison, with whom he kept up a warm friendship all his life; and was made free of society in the always intellectual and ambitious town. Next to Burns—though at how great a distance—he was the first inheritor of the northern laurels.

Mrs. Fletcher, one of the social authorities of the time, describes Campbell as "an ardent enthusiastic boy, younger even in appearance than in years." Sometimes the young poet, thus suddenly introduced into society, sinned against good-breeding, and this kind patroness of literature had once occasion to "give him a tremendous lecture" on the youthful impertinence with which he had "quizzed" the somewhat ridiculous old Earl of Buchan, then a well-known figure in Scotch society; but he seems to have taken his scolding like a man after the first pangs of injured pride. In other encounters his temper was not so perfect. Scott tells an amusing story of mutual offence, yet appreciation, which is exceedingly characteristic. Leyden had been the means of introducing Campbell to the genial house of Scott, who belonged to a higher social level than either of these young

men. But the two quarrelled on some personal matter, and, probably by way of bringing them together, Scott repeated to Leyden the fine ballad of *Hohenlinden*, which, like most of the poems of the time, was handed about in manuscript, and read and criticised by innumerable enthusiasts before it came the length of print. "Dash it, man," said Leyden, "tell the fellow I hate him. But, dash him, he has written the finest verses that have been published these fifty years." When this utterance was repeated to Campbell, that more dignified youth responded with offended solemnity, "Tell Leyden that I detest him; but I know the value of his critical approbation." How Scott must have laughed in his sleeve at the two affronted heroes! "I did mine errand as faithfully as one of Homer's messengers," he says.

The great poem, which excited so much admiration, and held a famous doctor breathless at the side of a counter, in oblivion of patients and engagements, exerts no such influence over any reader now. A line here and there has passed into the general recollection of the world, to be possessed and used by many who are totally unaware whence it came, and this is one test of fame; but it is to be feared that few now regard the *Pleasures of Hope* with breathless interest or understand the admiration it called forth. It is curious, however, to note at once the straightforwardness—surpassing that of any of his contemporaries, who were all moved as much as Campbell by the new reign of liberty and the hopes of universal renovation awakened in France—with which he plunges into the praise of Freedom and enumerates her heroes: and the skill with which he directs his reader to a corner of the struggle which alarmed nobody. To be told that

"Hope for a moment bade the world farewell,  
And Freedom shrieked when Kosciuszko fell,"

touched no political prejudices, and did not frighten the most timid Tory. The principles were liberal and noble : yet nearer home, perhaps, they might have been thought revolutionary. It probably was a mere poetical instinct in favour of a remoter and more picturesque struggle which made Campbell take all danger out of his worship of liberty by giving that dangerous goddess her local habitation in the favourite land of revolution, where everybody allows it to be legitimate. But it was a judicious choice, and recommended the young poet to the Liberal party without doing him any harm with the Conservatives. "Mr. Fletcher was won by his passion for liberty;" while Scott and the Tories found no fault with the revolutionary hero, who belonged to the romantic history of a previous struggle.

Thus Campbell derived, if not much profit, at least a great deal of pleasure and glory from his first work. Long afterwards he gave the following description of himself to one of the Kembles:—"The day that I first met your honoured father was at Henry Siddons', on the Calton Hill, in Edinburgh. The scenery of the Firth of Forth was in full view from the house; the time was summer, and the weather peculiarly balmy and beautiful. I was a young, shrinking, bashful creature; my poems were out a few days; and it was neck or nothing with me whether I should go down to the gulf of utter neglect or not, although with all my bashfulness I had then a much better opinion of myself and my powers than I have at this moment. Your dear father praised my work and quoted the line,

"'Tis distance lends enchantment to the view,'

looking at those very hills that suggested the thought. Well, I thought to myself (for, as I have said, I was at that time enormously vain), there is some taste in this

world, and I shall get on in it." This is very artless and simple, though the narrator was no longer the youth who believed the 'good taste of the world to be gauged by his power of "getting on" in it. We fear that the associations of the present generation with the lines in question are not reverential, and that, like so much pretty sentiment of the commonplace kind, this disrespectful age quotes them with rather a comic than a poetical sense of their truth. But when we think of the young dreamer looking out from that Athenian mount upon the hills, seeing across the gleaming Firth the round Lomonds in the nearer distance, the shadowy ranges beyond, we may believe that it was a real if not a very great inspiration that pointed out to him the ethereal blue, woven of air and space, which threw a tender glory over the homely grassy slopes which were neither great nor lofty in themselves. If universal quotation is the test of excellence, no detached line in poetry was ever more popular than this; and yet the reader will smile. The simile will recall to him not the blue mountains rising far in shadowy infinitude, slope beyond slope, against the sky, but only certain little moral or social deceptions in respect to which he has quoted these words a hundred times. Thus what was poetry in the fresher experience of the world of that day, all touched with the sympathy of a poetic revival, has fallen into completest commonplace with us who live in an older and less susceptible age.

The profit of the work was not inconsiderable considering its character, and that the rate of extraordinary remuneration inaugurated by Scott had not as yet been revealed. "The copyright," he himself says, "of my *Pleasures of Hope*, worth an annuity of two hundred pounds for life, was sold out and out for sixty pounds." His calculation is founded, his biographer tells, on an offer made to Campbell by a London publisher three years after.

Certainly, no publisher anywhere would offer an annuity of two hundred pounds for such a poem now—or probably anything at all until the public had very clearly expressed its opinion. The sum was not very large, but Messrs. Mundell of Edinburgh, though they flourished before the era of the great Constables and Blackwoods, must have been liberal in their generation, since they gave the poet, notwithstanding their purchase of the copyright, fifty pounds for each new edition. This, to a man so young, and so little accustomed to money, was no insignificant sum. He began, as was natural, to plan new works, and gave himself up to the intoxicating ideal of a life of poetry and praise, in which the most delightful of occupations should secure him all the rewards necessary for life, substantial means, as well as the sweetest applause. He was to write a poem upon “Helvetian Freedom,” with Tell for a hero: he was to gratify his own patriotic feelings and stimulate those of his countrymen by *The Queen of the North*, a poem of which Edinburgh was to be the scene, and “the glory and independence of Scotland” the subject. And it was while musing of those great themes that a faculty in him more real than that which went to the weaving of the *Pleasures of Hope*, was suddenly awakened by the singing, at one of the houses to which he was invited in Edinburgh, of the fine air of the well-known song, *Ye Gentlemen of England*. Perhaps, all fresh in his fervour of poetic composition, Campbell despised the old-fashioned words which have returned into favour now. At all events, his ear was caught by the air, and he began to sing to himself the bolder strain of his *Mariners of England*, as true and fine a national song as ever was written. How it was that this fine ardour and lyrical passion should burst from the bosom of the self-contained, shy, susceptible, and timorous young poet, who appears to us in his biography always a little on the defensive, with

no real trust in the great people among whom he had strayed, and who, though with much tenderness of affection towards his special friends, had very little to say to them—it is impossible to explain. Naturally, he was as little aware, as are most other mortal performers, which string of his instrument it was that rang the truest.

He had, however, discretion enough to see that to continue for ever the object of the delightful plaudits of the Edinburgh circles, and the “tremendous lectures” of its kind ladies, was impossible: and some side influence, probably Scott’s *Lenore* and *Goetz von Berlichingen*, and the rising knowledge of German literature, which was moving society about him, induced Campbell to decide upon going to Germany. He does not seem, however, to have had any very distinct aim in so doing, or even to have known where to go or what to do when he got there. He went without the advantage of possessing any language but his own, and though he anticipates before starting that “I shall see Schiller and Goethe, the banks of the Rhine, and the mistress of Werter” (though where he was to find the latter we do not know), he does not seem to have fulfilled any of those hopes. He saw Klopstock, in Hamburg; he wandered to Ratisbon, choosing that place for no apparent reason, was there when the French took the city, and afterwards made various devious pilgrimages, which were, however, not without profit. He saw—if not Goethe—Hohenlinden, and those pale currents of the Iser, ashen hued by nature, which were so fatally reddened. He saw more than one terrible field of battle in all the stillness of the accomplished carnage, lighted by “the wolf-scaring faggot that guarded the slain.” He was driven home at last in the spring of the year 1801, having been eight or nine months absent, by the declaration of war against Denmark, his residence at Altona being no longer tenable under the circumstances. At Altona he

had met a number of exiled Irishmen, who suggested his *Exile of Erin*. Thus, his best-known lyrics sprang into being, all keen with personal impression. *The Battle of the Baltic* and *The Soldier's Dream*, perhaps the most refined and exquisite of all, came from the same experiences. He met no poets, got admission to no intellectual society—in which, indeed, it is probable that his somewhat self-absorbed mind, dwelling in the circle of its own tenacious likings, shy and obstinate, and unskilled in speech—though he seems to have stumbled along *tant bien que mal* by the aid of Latin—would have received but little advantage. But he received much from the picture never to be forgotten of the field of battle—

“Our bugles sang truce—for the night-cloud had lowered,  
And the sentinel stars set their watch in the sky ;  
And thousands had sunk on the ground overpowered,  
The weary to sleep, and the wounded to die.”

The English language has nothing finer or more inspiriting in their kind than the patriotic ballads which were perfected at this period. The song which he had begun to adapt in the Edinburgh drawing-room to the old tune he liked, was finished at Altona—

“Britannia needs no bulwark,  
No towers along the steep,”

was the poet's answer to the suggestion of the proposed fortifications with which England has so often been adjured to defend herself against invaders. His protest was little reasonable, no doubt, but it was a popular sentiment. And it is one of the mysteries of genius which is least comprehensible, how a youth of the most peaceable sort, trained upon letters, and sea-sick and wretched when fate compelled him to cross the Channel, should have been the person to add to our national literature those boldest and most gallant of sailor-lyrics. Curiously enough, he seems, according to Scott at least, to have been doubtful



about these finest efforts of his genius. "And there's that glorious little poem of *Hohenlinden*," Scott said to Washington Irving—"after he had written it he did not seem to think much of it—'d—d drum and trumpet lines.' I got him to write it to me, and I believe that the delight I felt and expressed had an effect in inducing him to print it. The fact is, Campbell is in a manner a bugbear to himself. The brightness of his early success is a detriment to all his further efforts. He is afraid of the shadow that his own form casts before him." How strange is the reversal made by time of those decisions of the moment which have so much effect upon the lives of the candidates for literary fame! "The brightness" of Campbell's "early success" has now all faded away, and very few are the readers who open the *Pleasures of Hope*, or linger over the measured monotony of *Gertrude of Wyoming*. But *Hohenlinden*, *The Battle of the Baltic*, *The Soldier's Dream*, and *The Mariners of England*, will live as long as the language, and are the only real foundation of Campbell's fame.

His life after this early and brilliant beginning was much like that of all his class, the unfortunates who, beguiled by "early success," throw themselves upon literature as a profession, without any other more permanent and satisfactory stay. In saying this we do not mean to echo the ignorant, though not altogether unfounded, prejudice which once existed against literary solvency and capacity to "pay its way." Scott made the profession one of splendid profit as well as reputation, and some fortunes have been made and many comfortable incomes, since Scott, by the pen. But at the same time there can be little doubt that it is a precarious and anxious profession, an excellent addition to his means who has already something more steady and regular to lean upon, but a poor foundation upon which to build the responsibilities of life.

Campbell's story is one from which the young poet may learn a serious lesson. He was not one of those shiftless sons of letters, who are constantly falling upon the aid of their friends, but a proud man with much independence of spirit. Nor was he altogether without other means. At least one fortunate legacy came to his aid when he was struggling with the burdens of mid-life, and other windfalls fell in his way; but even with these the dependence of a family upon the capacity of its head to produce a constant supply of so much written matter, worthy or unworthy, is a very serious matter. In Campbell's case, as in many others, the very anxiety to do well, and to have his tale of bricks ready at the appointed time, often so preoccupied his brain that he was rendered incapable of the task he contemplated with so much anxiety. And when sunshine came and he ventured upon a little extra expense, apparently justified by his increasing means, there had to be almost invariably a painful retracing of his steps, when it turned out that to-morrow was not as to-day, and the powers that served him so well one season failed him the next. Poetry of course, as everybody knows, will not always come when it is called, but even "Annuals," and "Selections," and magazine articles, require an effort of which the brain of the literary hack is not always capable. Not a navvy nor a sailor, or take a finer simile, a successful surgeon, requires a stronger head, a more steady hand, nerves of iron and health unbroken, than an author who lives by his work, and has no other means of procuring his daily bread. Campbell became the editor of the *New Monthly Magazine*, and did not flourish in that capacity. He was over-anxious, over-scrupulous as to the value of the contributions sent to him—then after hesitating over his papers for days would make a leap at the worst of them, to the confusion of his previous deliberations. And he fell into the beaten track, produced biographies and

histories, for which he had neither the turn nor the training. What he could do was not the kind of thing that can be done to order. The noble and spirit-stirring national lyrics of which he is the author were far beyond the powers of poets much greater than he. He has no other ground of pretension to stand by the side of Wordsworth, or Coleridge, or even Scott; but in this special branch of poetry he has done what not all of them put together could do.

Campbell's career was deeply weighted in other ways. His only son, whose childhood had been beautiful beyond expression to the tender father, who felt, as young parents often do, his own child a revelation from heaven, was a life-long grief and disappointment to him, and spent most of his life in a lunatic asylum. His wife died early; and he was left to make up to himself, as far as he could, by a hundred gentle flirtations, chiefly with ladies under the age of ten, for the absence of a woman's society, and the bright faces of children. Some of his innocent adventures in this way are at once amusing and pathetic. On one occasion he advertised as follows for the name of a lovely child whom he had encountered in the streets:—

“A gentleman, sixty-three years old, who, on Saturday last . . . met with a most interesting-looking child, four years of age; but who forbore, from respect for the lady who had her in hand, to ask the girl's name and abode, will be gratefully obliged to those who have the happiness of possessing the child, to be informed where she lives, and if he may be allowed to see her again.”

The little fairy princess never was found, though many parents wrote to the advertiser, making sure that their own special darling must have been the object of so romantic an appeal, one mother among the number, to Campbell's great indignation, suggesting that it was her little *boy* for whom he had conceived such an enthusiasm. The gray-haired poet, daunted in his natural shyness by a

forbidding countenance, and seeking this little phantom of delight about the London streets, and through the leafless parks in the sunshiny April mornings, makes a touching, if gently-comic picture; for though he had many friends, he had no smiles at home.

“I stopped the enchantress, and was told,  
Tho’ tall, she was but four years old,  
Her guide so grave an aspect wore,  
I would not ask a question more.”

Such a curious innocent version of a “love that never had an earthly close,” draws our hearts to the forlorn and solitary man.

Amid all his ups and downs of living, Campbell had the pleasure of continual acknowledgment and appreciation from the public. When he took to delivering lectures upon poetry his audiences were crowded and enthusiastic wherever he went, both in London and the provinces. “The lecture-room was crowded by the *élite*; all were eager to listen;” “his prose was declared to be more poetic than his poetry,” the newspapers reported. In 1826 his University (Glasgow) paid him the highest compliment in its power by electing him Lord Rector, a post which, contrary to custom, he held for three years. He was received in Glasgow, his native town, with unbounded enthusiasm, filling his old friends with joy and pride, and recalling many an early prognostication. Ten years after he visited Edinburgh, to find most of the patrons of his youth still alive, and to be received everywhere with acclamations. “Cheered on coming aboard the steamboats—into public rooms—on leaving them,” he says with an astonished pleasure, describing his journey. And here he had the freedom of the town bestowed upon him, and a public dinner, and every kind of flattering observance. “I have been made a freeman of Edinburgh and *fêted* like a prince,” he says. “I shall make you laugh at the effu-

sions of my vanity when I describe to you the windows of Queen Street filled with ladies looking at your little Solomon in all his glory! . . . Well, laugh as you well may at my being vain of being seen by ladies, I think you know me well enough to believe that the excitement of last Friday was intense—beyond pleasure and amounting to pain. . . . When I came to speak of Dugald Stewart, Alison, and other of my old Edinburgh friends the act of suppressing tears (for I did suppress them) amounted to agony.” He found, however, all these old friends enjoying their old age in the calm and gentle satisfaction which becomes the end of life. The “dear old Priest,” the “Man of Taste,” Alison, whom the grateful poet had called the father of his mind, and whose name he had given to his second child, who died in infancy, was still living “in very fair health for a man of eighty,” and “with his faculties as fresh as ever;” while Dugald Stewart, he who had patronised the youth of Burns, as well as that of Campbell, still lived in peaceful retirement surrounded with love and honour.

This return to the scenes of his youth, notwithstanding the glories heaped upon him, was full of sadness to the man with whom life had dealt but hardly. Mrs. Grant relates how, in the midst of his public triumphs, “a dejected-looking gentleman” called upon her to renew old acquaintance. “I should know you,” she said, “but cannot be sure.” “Campbell the poet,” said he, “with a kind of affecting simplicity.”

This is the last sight we have of the old generation, the men of the past, who had wondered at Burns when he appeared, and lived to see so many wonders more. It lingered so long that Henry Mackenzie, the Man of Feeling, he of the *Mirror* and *Lounger*, lived to see Edinburgh blossom out of its provincialism into the dash and commotion of a literary metropolis. This age of greatness

lasted through many brilliant years. Even after Scott's withdrawal to Abbotsford, he was still to be seen about the familiar streets and in the Parliament House—on the whole the greatest of living writers; and there was Jeffrey, the acknowledged chief of criticism, though the excitement of the *Edinburgh Review* had by this time calmed down. And other figures had risen to diversify the scene. Miss Ferrier, the author of *Marriage* and *The Inheritance*, books which secured Scott's warm admiration and have continued their hold upon the succeeding generations—a Scotch Miss Austen, with a broader perception of the ludicrous and a less delicate touch, but much of the same minute and graphic power; Mrs. Grant of Laggan, a woman to whose recollections we are indebted for many particulars of the cheerful breadth of Edinburgh society at this its most brilliant period, and whose *Letters from the Mountains* helped to make the Highlands known in their homelier modern aspect; and many more secondary singers and gentle essayists. The Blackwood circle, too, with all its wild wit and daring discussion of everything in heaven and earth, was in fullest force; and life was overflowing in the old lofty streets, outside the noise of which, yet not entirely withdrawn from its echoes, the patriarchs of the former generation were “wearing away.”

We may add, before we leave these northern scenes, to which for a time the high flood of intellectual activity seemed to have been transferred, the gentle name of James Grahame, the author of the “Sabbath.” He was not a great poet, nor is that a great poem, but it is very national, and full of a tender sweetness—an echo of Cowper on Scottish soil. Grahame came to light among the early band of the *Edinburgh Reviewers*, a spectator and sympathiser, if no more—adding a mild enthusiasm for the work of his stronger and more daring friends to his own gentle faculty. He was one of the unemployed

young advocates who trod the pavement in the Parliament House along with Jeffrey and Horner, but tiring of that exercise, and possessing little power to struggle with the world, he retired into the congenial quiet of a clergyman's life, taking orders in the Church of England. His poems are full of the atmosphere of a pure and retired existence, with something, however, that reminds the reader more of a Scotch manse than an English parsonage; and he was always intensely national. "Must I leave," he says,

"Dear land, thy bonnie braes, thy dales,  
Each haunted by its myriad streams, o'erhung  
With all the varied charms of bush and tree,  
And mould my heart anew to take the stamp  
Of foreign friendships in a foreign land,  
And learn to love the music of strange tongues!  
Yes, I may love the music of strange tongues,  
And mould my heart anew to take the stamp  
Of foreign friendships in a foreign land;  
But to my parched mouth's roof cleave my tongue,  
My fancy fade into the yellow leaf,  
And this oft-pausing heart forget to throb,  
If, Scotland, thee and thine, I e'er forget."

It is a curious example of the changes that increased communication and constant intercourse have made, to realise that Grahame's foreign land was no farther off than the English side of the Tweed. He was one of the friends whom Thomas Campbell made in the period of his early glory in Edinburgh, and the following little sketch gives some idea of the gentle and pious poet:—

"So small a part of James's value lay in his poetry, that I feel it difficult to express my sentiments about it. . . . One of the most endearing circumstances which I remember of Grahame was his singing. I shall never forget one summer evening that we agreed to sit up all night, and go together to Arthur's Seat to see the sun rise. We sat accordingly all night in his delightful parlour — the seat of so many happy remembrances. We then went out,

and saw a beautiful sunrise. I returned home with him, for I was living in his house at the time. He was unreserved in all his devoutest feelings before me ; and from the beauty of the morning scenery, and the recent death of his sister, our conversation took a serious turn. As I retired to my own bed, I overheard his devotions—not his prayer, but a hymn which he sang, and with a power and inspiration beyond himself and beyond anything else. At that time he was a strong-voiced and commanding-looking man. The remembrance of his large expressive features when he climbed the hill, and of his organ-like voice in praising God, is yet fresh and ever pleasing in my mind.”

This gentle pair, full of religion and devotion, their heads running over with verse and poetic musings, as they climbed in that dreamy dimness which was neither night nor dawn, the rugged ways where solitude lies sacred and still as if in the heart of the mountains, might have seen from the heights the luminous window where the plotters of the *Edinburgh Review* were arranging their onslaught upon the world, a scene as different as it is possible to conceive. And it was not long after that the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, in full swing of free poetry and criticism, began to awaken all the echoes. Wilson’s tavern parlour, whether real or imaginary, has as genuine an existence as Edinburgh itself ; and though all that eloquence and mirth, and pathos, and delightful madness of inspired talk has fallen a little out of hearing now-a-days, it was in its time as authentic a scene as any club in the three kingdoms, and far more entertaining and brilliant than any of them. To these voices old Edinburgh laughed and listened with an uproar of mirth and applause, while Scott poured forth the great romances which kept all Europe breathless, and little Jeffrey sat in precise yet lively state, cutting and carving the reputations of all the poets, and dealing his strokes about like lightning. Another great and characteristic figure, the prophet and Seer whom we have so recently lost, Thomas Carlyle, though but for a moment associated with this scene, had



begun to be known, though but vaguely, through the early mists. In all the corners there was twittering of smaller singers, simple yet tuneful—such as linger with the larks about the dewy fields, and take pleasure in their song without getting more credit for it than their little prototype; and in the pulpit there had risen a blear-eyed and rugged orator, with heavy features and a broad Fife accent, Thomas Chalmers, who was the greatest preacher of his day. At no time has Edinburgh come to such a climax of genius and fame.

THOMAS CAMPBELL, born 1771; died 1844.

Published *The Pleasures of Hope*, 1799.

*Gertrude of Wyoming*, 1809.

Lyrics in *Morning Chronicle*, 1800-1802.

*Specimens of British Poets*, 1818.

*Theodric, etc.*, 1824.

*Pilgrim of Glencoe*, 1842.

*Annals of Great Britain*.

*Life of Mrs. Siddons*.

*Life of Petrarch*.

Edited the new *Monthly Magazine* in which the late Lyrics were published, from 1820 to 1830.

JAMES GRAHAME, born 1765; died 1811.

Published *The Sabbath*, 1804.

*Sabbath Walks*, 1805.

*Biblical Pictures*, } 1806

*Birds of Scotland*, }

*British Energies*, 1809.

## CHAPTER V.

## LONDON : THE LOWER CIRCLE—"THE COCKNEY SCHOOL."

A LITTLE before the beginning of the outburst of literary life in Edinburgh, which has been the subject of our recent chapters, a curious and characteristic circle, or series of circles, existed in London, quite distinct from the higher level of life and letters on which Canning and his polite associates flourished. This lower region possessed many peculiarities of the old Grub Street existence. It was poor; its life was full of literary schemes and compilations of all kinds, "Specimens," "Selections," "Epitomes of History," "Annual Registers," and many more—which, along with such poor scraps as were then required in the shape of magazine articles, answered the purpose of securing daily bread to a large body of writers to whom literature had become a trade; while ever and anon a poem, more or less ambitious, a drama, a philosophical essay, would burst forth from the obscurity to show how among these poor literary hacks, labouring hard in their vocation, there was some genius and much ambition, and *what not* to do something worth remembering, or being remembered by, which gives a generous inspiration often to the merest scribbler. The most remarkable and individual figure among them was that of William Godwin, whose works, both of philosophy and imagination, if such a sombre and subtle study of motive

and impulse as *Calcb Williams* can be called by the latter name, have taken a permanent place in literature. So much can scarcely be said for Holcroft, whose novels have dropped out of recollection altogether, though one or two of his dramas, notably the *Road to Ruin*, still hold the stage; or Hazlitt, most of whose essays and criticisms, though often brilliant, have fallen into that limbo which, alas! is the natural place even of the ablest commentaries upon other men's works and lives. One of the most curious particulars in the life of these London coteries of the poorer kind is the quiet commonplace *bourgeois* existence which they carried on obscurely in out-of-the-way streets in all the usual subjection to law and social order, notwithstanding that the principles they maintained were wild enough, as they thought themselves, and as many people thought, to upset all the foundations of society and blow the British Empire out of its secure place in the protecting seas. Some of them were tried for high treason, no less, in those hot and exciting French Revolution days. They were considered dangerous to their country and to religion, and to everything that the ordinary mass holds sacred; yet, nevertheless, lived very quiet, humdrum, citizens lives, guilty of little more than an occasional indulgence in what is euphemistically called "wine," and fighting very hardly for existence in the lower levels of literary work. They possess a certain importance in literary history, chiefly as examples of that boundless underground of persevering labour which exists in every generation unseen, struggling with, yet clinging to, "the booksellers," concocting with them a hundred schemes which are as much "trade" on the one side as the other, furnishing series of histories, of biographies, of editions of the poets, in continued repetition, yet fondly retaining still that hope of the dreaming fancy—

“To frame it knows not what exelling thing,  
And win it knows not what sublime reward  
Of praise and honour.”

Godwin, who was the most remarkable member of this group, was at the same time the most striking example of its union of extravagant opinions and humdrum life. Twice during his career his house and name came before the world with an original and even dazzling identity, in strange discordance with the calm and tradesmanlike tenor of his ordinary habits. One of these periods was that in which the philosopher, with his bold and wild opinions and prim pedantic yet romantic temper, found his mate in the beautiful and brave woman whose pensive countenance and untimely fate silence criticism, who was, like himself, a philosopher and sceptic, and whose name for long was the emblem of unwomanly revolutionism, regarded by the public with that horror which unbelief in a woman always inspires. Mary Wollstonecraft was Godwin's wife for not more than a year, but this brief romance gives him an interest which does not really belong to him as a human creature in his own right. Some seventeen years later the brilliant apparition of the young Shelley, sweetest, most visionary, and most lawless of poets, crossed this humdrum life, and once more it blazes out for a moment upon the world. In neither instance is the light without painful and bitter shadows, but it interrupts with curious intensity as obstinate, serious, self-willed, and dull a career as ever London citizen lived among the dingy little streets, monotonous in a half twilight of ordinariness and routine. *Caleb Williams* and the *Political Justice* burst out of this gray existence as Mary Wollstonecraft and young Shelley broke into it; but the time illustrated by these luminous points is as a half-hour in a long day of dull and regular occupation, domesticity, shopkeeping, homely meals, and humdrum surroundings.

There was no wealth and little grace of aspect in this underground society, in the small houses and back parlours which were in themselves so unbeautiful; and it is difficult, without some aid of money, to give interest to domestic surrounding, at least in a great monotonous town, where the idyllic is out of place, and such a happy thrifty home as that of Southey's among the mountains is impossible. The Holerofts and Hazlitts had not the gift of Boswell to make the bustling old streets and dingy coffee-houses picturesque and animated, and the atmosphere is dull which breathes about them, although the Lambs would sometimes come arm-in-arm to call, or Coleridge make his appearance looming largely against the sky, or Wordsworth pay a passing visit, bringing with him the breath of the hills.

Otherwise we find little beauty, either of temper or manners, in this little world of literature. It is hopelessly plebeian and narrow, self-asserting and self-repeating. Except in the case of "Lamb, the frolic and the gentle," neither the conversations nor the letters are of a brilliant character that reach us out of that active, fluent, much-discussing, and reasoning community, where every individual possessed some notable features, and all were supposed to be, and believed themselves, guides of opinion and teachers of men. Upon the Lambs in their quaint city chambers, the walls lined with dark "Hoggarths" and old books; the tables surrounded once a week with earnest whist-players; the supper spread on one side, cold beef and roast potatoes, and the kindest welcome—the spectator lingers lovingly. No such pair as that brother and sister are in all the bands of their contemporaries: the tender love that braved every suffering undaunted—the forlorn delightful wit that made shift to smile amid its tears—the union, passing that even of marriage, of common misfortune, of heroic

self-devotion, of fraternity above all parallel—the patience and the misery, and the peace and happiness, what words can do justice to them? To see them in their low-roofed, dark little rooms up those stairs in the Temple, looking out upon the court, where, for pleasure and diversion, “there is a pump always going,” and “the trees come in at the window, so that it is like living in a garden:” or sitting together “in the front row of the pit at Drury Lane:” or taking their “evening walk, past the theatres, to look at the outside of them at least,” through the streets, all dim with smoky oil lamps, and twinkling shop-windows, and the news of battles and victories cried about the pavements: or perhaps with a heartrending sympathy, to watch them turning sadly in their periodical pilgrimage towards the asylum, in which one of them had to spend half her life — “slowly pacing together a little footpath in Hoxton fields, both weeping bitterly”—is perhaps, of all the sights then procurable in England, the one most entirely touching. But it is not Charles and Mary Lamb that are our subjects, though they were by far the most attractive group in the literary community, quick and keen, and vivacious, and headstrong, hot in politics and obstinate in philosophy, which flourished in the narrow city streets, dining upon hot shoulders of mutton, and supping on pieces of cold beef, and contenting itself in its little sphere of limited enjoyment and middle-class atmosphere, as unlike as possible to the more elegant and bigger world of letters, which scarcely touched it in its totally different orbit above.

William Godwin was the son of a dissenting minister in the country, a man of narrow but fervent religious zeal, “with so great a disapprobation for the Church of England as rather to approve of his children absenting themselves from all public worship than joining in her

offices,"—one of a class which has supplied more largely, perhaps, than any other, the rank and file of literary workers. The position of a dissenting minister is, and still more was, one of considerable picturesqueness and a sort of paradoxical interest: for while the ambition of the class invariably, or almost invariably, points towards letters and cultivation, their generally hopeless confinement within a petty circle of uneducated and narrow-minded people gives them a bitter sense of exclusion from what they most desire, an exclusion which, without being really a wrong done to them by society, appears like one, and impresses the individual as a distinct personal injury. "Their youthful hopes and vanity had been mortified in them," says Hazlitt, another branch of the same tree, and an excellent authority on the subject, "even in their boyish days, by the neglect and supercilious regard of the world:" which perhaps may be explained to mean that the world objected, under any circumstances, to accept the training of the dissenting colleges as equal to that of the universities, even though the dissenter might know himself, and might really be, infinitely more intellectual and cultivated than the Oxford pass-man; or to grant to the preacher, whose sphere was confined to the lower and least instructed middle classes, the same position as the clergyman who, however poor, has still the possibility of high clerical rank and importance before him.

This disadvantage, which is, we fear, still in many country circles unalterable, adds a persistent undertone of injured feeling, even now, to the sentiment of the clerical class in dissenting communities. Although their position has been greatly modified by the growth of so many wealthy and cultivated congregations in large towns, it is still sufficiently affected by the same depressing influence as to retain a certain injured tone, a mixture of self-

assertion and resentment, which, if not amiable, are yet sufficiently natural feelings; and this sense of injury gives a strong bias of sentiment to the democratic opinions generally prevalent among them. "Their sympathy was not with the oppressors, but the oppressed," Hazlitt adds, with a natural adoption of a most natural prejudice, as if the class he describes were really oppressed and not merely the victims of circumstance, suffering for their resistance to an accepted order of things which they professed to despise, and, according to their own principles, ought to have despised. We would not linger upon this definition of the dissenting minister and his place in the world if we did not feel the importance of it, in reference to the many writers expressing sentiments of extreme liberalism, both in religion and politics, who have come from this class. The sons of dissenting ministers are, in a manner, born heirs to this sense of wrong: they have a fanciful rank as the most highly instructed in their own sphere, which the general world refuses to ratify. And those who, setting out perhaps from no very elevated social level, enter life through this curious little side-door to letters and public influence, are apt to feel its restrictions all the more bitterly from the high expectations of inexperience, to which society always seems more delightful and inspiring than reality shows it: and can scarcely help looking with scorn upon those no better, or probably much less capable than themselves, whom the world persistently ranks above them. They are thus put on the side of all who have a grievance, all the world over. And yet the wrong is imaginary, the grievance only one of those sentimental grievances which cut deeper than actual wounds, yet are too wide and general to be anybody's fault. The principle of sectarianism, and the deification of individual opinion to which it leads, no doubt helps on the full development of every intellectual



vagary ; but we believe that the social disqualifications, which bring with them a profound sense of injury, not to be healed by any practical success, have still more to do with this tendency towards scepticism in religion and revolutionism in politics. Nor do we accuse dissenting ministers of any pettiness or conscious warp of feeling in this instinctive sentiment. No injury is so deep as systematic disparagement, the allowed and instinctive imputation of inferiority ; and when, in addition to the fact that there is often no reason for it, there is added the other still more painful fact that there seems no help for it, it is impossible to wonder at the deep-lying resentment it produces—resentment as causeless and as hopeless as itself.

It was from this class of poor and strongly-feeling men, whose position, had they been in the Church of England, would have been that of the most conservative and constitutional of all poorly remunerated and hard-worked public servants, but who, out of it, were the natural champions of every infringed right, and warmest eager upholders of every democratic claim—men to whom every poor curate, no better off than themselves, embodied the principle of aristocracy and tyranny—that Godwin sprang. He began life a precociously rigid Calvinist, and at seventeen was rejected at Homerton Academy “on suspicion of Sandemanianism,” the straitest form of the Calvinistic system. At Hoxton, where he entered on being thus repulsed, under an apparently milder sway, he maintained the doctrine of eternal punishment against his tutor, and came out of college in his twenty-third year “as pure a Sandemanian as I had gone in.” But no sooner was he out of college than the conflicting tides of opinion seized him, and “my religious creed insensibly degenerated,” he says. He was actually a dissenting minister at Ware, the religious instructor of a congrega-

tion, when his mind thus changed. This modification of his views was brought about by contact with another member of the same profession, the Rev. Joseph Fawcett (it is curious how particular both Godwin and Hazlitt are in giving this unknown authority the title of Reverend), who was considered among his contemporaries "a person of literary eminence," author of the *Art of War*, and a popular lecturer, but now altogether fallen out of knowledge—"one of whose favourite topics was a declamation against the domestic affections." By the influence of Fawcett and the gradual development of his own mind, Godwin was brought, though not till after he had served another dissenting congregation for some two years as their pastor—leaving them "in consequence of a dispute with my hearers on a question of Church discipline"—to abandon his profession and take to literature. By this time he was gradually getting loose from religious faith altogether, plunging into the works of "the French philosophers," and, like most of his generation, turning his eyes with more and more intense interest to the great drama then just beginning on the other side of the Channel, where every tie was philosophically unloosed before the great current of popular passion awoke to appal the theorists. It is curious to think of Godwin, the future preacher of absolute theoretical lawlessness, he who believed rule and punishment to be conducive to vice, and marriage a pernicious institution, quarrelling with his congregation on a question of Church discipline.

When he thus abandoned the career for which he had been trained, his first step was to go to London, and his first idea to adopt literature as his profession, after the example of so many others: it was not, however, the modern version of the trade, but essentially the threadbare and beggarly Grub Street form of it upon which Godwin entered. His *Life of Lord Chatham*, his first

literary performance, shows the ambition of an independent writer: but as soon as he settled in London he seems to have fallen into the melancholy routine of a literary hack. "My principal employment was now writing for the *English Review*, published by Murray in Fleet Street, at two guineas the sheet, in which employment it was my utmost hope to gain twenty-four guineas per annum. This was probably the busiest period of my life; in the latter end of 1783 I wrote, in ten days, a novel called *Damon and Delia*, for which Hookham gave me five guineas, and a novel in three weeks called *Italian Letters*, purchased by Robinson for twenty guineas; and in the first four months of 1784 a novel called *Imogen*, a Pastoral Romance, for which Vane gave me ten pounds." This was followed by "a small volume of my Sermons," dedicated to the Bishop of Llandaff, and various translations and book-work of different kinds. The literary hack of the present day may take comfort in seeing this list of the early and unremembered labours of a man whose reputation has already lasted a century, and whose position in literature is so well defined. Notwithstanding all that is said about the increase of popular literature and the unbounded fertility of the present generation in novel-writing, we believe there are now no literature shops where wares manufactured at this rate would sell in the same way. Even that branch of the craft which supplies the *Family Herald* and *London Journal* has encouragement to take more time at least upon its productions.

Godwin lived in this way for about ten years, during which his creed underwent various modifications from Socinianism to Deism, and passed through many vague shades of sentiment in respect to the possible existence of God. He became, he says, "a complete unbeliever" in 1787; but even that seems doubtful, since there are self-

discussions on the subject at a later period, and he did not hesitate to say, in a letter to his mother, that he had "faithfully endeavoured to improve the faculties and opportunities God has given me"—though the words might be used in deference to the prejudices of the very notable, pious, thrifty, and sensible old lady, whose letters to her son (though without any commas) are about the most natural and wholesome things in Godwin's biography. He lived in homely lodgings in the Strand during this period, and occasionally saw very good company; but all his intimate relations were with men of similar training and convictions to his own. He had a brother or two in town—not very creditable to their family, as appears from the mother's frequent comments and lamentations—and a sister who was established as a dressmaker; and all his surroundings were of a humble class.

When Godwin began his life in London there was also existing there among the shadows a sort of jovial Satyr, not of any class that was recognised by respectability, half parson, half doctor, an altogether lawless personage, whose career from beginning to end had little in it but rude adventure and reckless living, but whose name cannot be omitted in any record of the literature of his period. John Wolcot, or Peter Pindar, as he called himself, had gone through a whole Odyssey before his appearance in the London streets as a man of letters and satirical poet. He had been brought up in the medical profession in his youth, but, going to Jamaica, had found apparently that it would suit his purposes better to be a clergyman, and, according to the easy methods of the time, came home and got himself ordained by the then Bishop of London, for the advantage of his West Indian patients. When he came back finally to England he threw off the clerical character and resumed the medical; and while trying to establish himself in Cornwall in the

latter profession, picked up as his surgery-boy a little Cornishman, a miner's son, John Opie, who turned out to have what was considered at that time a genius for art. It was the growing success of this young painter, whom he had honestly helped on and furthered with all his power, that brought Wolcot to London; and it was here apparently that the strange and abundant faculty of satiric verse which distinguished him found its way into public notice. He had subjects in plenty ready to his hand, and first among them the quaint irrepressible figure of the old king George III., which shines in his verse with a graphic individuality such as graver history rarely secures for its heroes. It would be hard to call these mock odes and ballads ill-natured. They were calculated to make the monarch's august form ridiculous, and sharply point the ludicrous inappropriateness of such a mind as the possessor of royal power; but at this distance the fun and sport and spontaneous overflowing laughter of the satirist, and the perfect and laughable distinctness of the figure he sets before us, are far more conspicuous than any political mischief that could have been in them. The story of the Dumpling, over which the inquisitive king puzzled his brains to know how the apples got into it, and the visit of his Majesty to Whitbread's brewery, are still as amusing as when they were written; and few of the personages in grave historical biography stand out with half the force which characterises this careless light-hearted picture, in which the fun is so much more prominent than the satire.

'Now did his majesty so gracious say  
To Mr. Whitbread in his flying way,  
'Whitbread, d'ye nick th' excisemen now and then?  
Ha, Whitbread, when d'ye think to leave off trade?  
'Ho? what? Miss Whitbread's still a maid, a maid?  
What, what's the matter with the men?

- “ ‘D’ye hunt?—hæ, hunt? No, no, you are too *old*—  
You’ll be lord may’r—lord may’r one day—  
Yes, yes, I’ve heard so—yes, yes, so I’m told:  
Don’t, don’t the fine for sheriff pay—  
I’ll prick you ev’ry year, man, I declare:  
Yes, Whitbread—yes, yes—you shall be lord may’r.
- “ ‘Whitbread, d’ye keep a coach, or job one, pray?  
Job, job, that’s cheapest—yes, that’s best, that’s best—  
You put your liv’ries on your draymen—hæ?  
Hæ, Whitbread?—You have feather’d well your nest.  
What, what’s the price now, hæ, of all your stock?  
But, Whitbread, what’s o’clock, pray, what’s o’clock?’
- “ Now Whitbread inward said, ‘May I be curst  
If I know what to answer first;’  
Then search’d his brains with ruminating eye—  
But e’er the man of malt an answer found,  
Quick on his heel, lo, majesty turn’d round,  
Skipp’d off, and baulk’d the pleasure of reply.”

As an example of personal portraiture, distinct as photography and far more life-like, there could not be anything better than this. The malice has all evaporated out of it, but the amusing reality remains.

Wolcot treated a large number of his contemporaries as he treated George III., taking them off with infinite fun and frolic, and with a sense of enjoyment in that malicious pleasantry which takes the bitterness out of it; but the mimicry was so complete and the range so wide that Peter Pindar was as much dreaded by his possible victims as laughed over by the public, on whom he lavished the riotous outpourings of his mirth in the shape of little poetical pamphlets, which flew from hand to hand. He was bribed by Government at last, it is said by a pension, but that is a story of doubtful authority. There seems no doubt, however, that he did execute an arrangement with the booksellers which must have delighted him heartily for the sake of the practical joke that was in it. He got them to grant him an annuity

of £250 a year for the copyright of his works, and lived for more than twenty years in the enjoyment of this pension, when the works in question had sunk into the limbo of publications out of date. Probably this amused him as much as any "taking off" he ever succeeded in. His personal appearances are few in the society of his time. Gifford, provoked by some of his many assaults, published an epistle to Peter Pindar, all pompous abuse and rancour, without a gleam of the witty malice of his antagonist, in which Wolcot is described as

"A bloated mass, a gross blood-boltered clod ;  
A foe to man, a renegade from God."

This, apparently, was too much for the temper of the satirist, who waylaid Gifford and attacked him with a cudgel ; which, however, it was said, was turned against himself, and the result was a beating and humiliation, not to the Quarterly Reviewer, who, we feel sure, deserved it much more, but to Peter. "A Cut at a Cobbler" was his revenge. Such squabbles, however, are too petty to deserve a record. Wolcot seems to have been a Bohemian of the coarsest type, although, curiously enough, the finest of fine personages, Beckford, the author of *Vathek*, is one of the few to speak for him, describing him as "a delightful companion, and the best storyteller he ever heard ;" and we hear of him afterwards as showing magnanimous courtesy to another writer of the refined and cultured type, Isaac D'Israeli, than whom no man could be more unlike himself.

Wolcot is little more than a digression from our immediate subject, for his home would seem to have been in the darker depths of town life, not among our decent *bourgeoisie* of literature ; and we return to the circle whose homely life and high ambitions are our immediate subject in the person of Thomas Holcroft, who was one of

the friends and intimates of Godwin, and belonged to the same sphere. Holcroft, however, was of lower origin than the minister's son. He was the son of a shoemaker, and himself spent a portion of his youth in that speculative trade, varying it with the life of a groom in training-stables at Newmarket—until he suddenly found that he could write, and that the editor of a London evening paper would give him five shillings a column for his productions. But neither literature nor shoemaking got him bread, and he was about to enlist in the East India Company's Service when he was picked up by a theatrical recruiter in search of odd men, and thus began his connection with the theatre. His autobiography, which is a fine and original piece of writing, though he had no education but what he had himself picked up at chance moments in stables or on roadsides, breaks off at this period, giving us very little information except in respect to his youthful experiences as stable-boy and groom; and when years after he re-emerges into sight in London, he is already permanently established as a play writer and general *entrepreneur* in literature. It would be rash to say that Holcroft was the originator of the system of adaptation from the French, which has so largely tinctured the dramatic literature of our own time; but we are not aware that it had been further exercised than in translations and borrowings from Molière and other established writers, when the *Figaro* of Beaumarchais created an excitement in Paris which roused the interest of London managers. Holcroft had no sooner heard of this than he determined to rush over to Paris (not so easy a matter in those days) to make himself master of the new production. It was not printed, and the French manager had no idea of communicating the new work to an English stranger; it was necessary, therefore, to resort to other means. Holcroft accordingly, with the help of a French coadjutor,



adopted an original plan. They went to the theatre "every night, a week or ten days successively," and learned the play by heart. It was translated immediately, and produced in London very shortly afterwards ; and for this, which his biographer justly says was due "more to Mr. Holcroft's industry and enterprise than to his genius," he received six hundred pounds, "besides a considerable sum for the copyright." This was in the days when France was lying in the calm of expectancy before the storm, dreaming fine philosophical dreams of human perfectibility and the rights of man, and applauding, without a notion of what might come of it, *Figaro's* satirical commentary on the Count's advantages and qualities, "Qu'avez vous fait pour tant de bien ? vous vous êtes donné la peine de naître, et rien de plus." A little later Holcroft translated the works of the King of Prussia in "twelve or thirteen volumes," at which he worked night and day in order not to be forestalled, and for which he received twelve hundred pounds. It is a feature of the time as much as any other, that it should have been worth a publisher's while to give so large a sum for the "works of the King of Prussia." Unless his Majesty kept a private journal full of State secrets and gossip, no such trade importance would attend his productions now.

These strenuous exertions, not of a much higher class of labour than the paternal shoemaking, kept life afloat. But some of Holcroft's plays had real vitality, and one at least, the *Road to Ruin*, still maintains its place upon the stage.

Another member of the group was Mrs. Inchbald, whom the others admired and applauded—a beautiful and brilliant woman, poor but provident, who had been from early youth dependent upon her own exertions, and had kept her reputation and her freshness through the vicissitudes of an actress's life, before she came to the

more peaceful career of a successful author. Other figures flit to and fro through the misty scene. Ritson, the savage editor of the early English ballads, of whom there is an uncomfortable sketch in the life of Scott, and whose wild temper and vegetarian crotchets have found a more permanent place in history than his collections; and on the other extreme of sentimental gentility, Merry, and the other melodious elaborate songsters of the so-called Della Crusca School, upon whom Gifford directed his bitter and spiteful satires. At a later period Hazlitt joined this literary circle, then Leigh Hunt; and it began to be assailed as the "Cockney School" when *Blackwood's Magazine* and its skirmishers came into being. The epithet would be most completely merited but for the contempt implied. They were all Londoners, citizens living a homely town life, deep down underneath all the glitter of fashion, having their shabby meetings, their thrifty simple dinners—Lamb's card parties on the Wednesday being by far the finest things we hear of;—but always respectable in this, that they worked hard, and were constantly at work, with eyes open to every possibility of a want in the way of literature which the British public might deign to exhibit. They earned their living as laboriously as any other trade then going, and after they had earned it, yet added a virtue, and produced some *fine fleur* of intelligent observation, some tale or piece of reasoning which was their present to the world. Had anything but literature been their profession, a better example of the brotherliness and clinging together of a kindly craft and trade could not be, nor of the industry and perseverance which are the best preservatives of the working man. Whatever irregularities might be in their lives, they held close to their work, and stood by each other with exemplary fidelity. If the venerable popular fiction as to the rivalries, quarrels, and mutual hatred of

literary persons were not so deeply rooted, we might hope that this example among so many would make an end of the prejudice.

Nevertheless, as they were not perfect, quarrels did arise in the little community—hurricanes of sudden wrath from time to time. In Godwin's case these little discordances, *démêlés* as he calls them, were often very hot and stiff. "The same calm temperament which enabled him to dispense with much which is often thought of the essence of religion, seems to have kept him free from any feeling which can be called love," says Mr. Kegan Paul in his biography, "except the one great passion of his life: and even this was conducted with extreme outward and apparent phlegm. Friendship stood to him in the place of passion, as morality was to him in the room of devotion. All the jealousies, misunderstandings, wounded feelings, and the like, which some men experience in their love affairs, Godwin suffered in his relations with his friends. Fancied slights were exaggerated; quarrels, expostulations, reconciliations, followed quickly on each other, as though they were true *amantium ira*. And his relations with women were for the most part the same as those with men. His friendships were as real with the one as with the other, but they were no more than friendships." We must give one example of these storms, which 'is tragi-comic in the highest degree. What its occasion was has been long forgotten, but here is the fierce little epistle which Holcroft, his friend and brother, discharged at Godwin on some one of the small provocations of ordinary life:—

"SIR—I write to inform you that instead of seeing you at dinner to-morrow, I desire never to see you more, being determined never to have *any* further intercourse with you of any kind.

T. HOLCROFT.

"I shall behave, as becomes an honest and honourable man, who

remembers not only what is due to others but to himself. They are indelible, irrevocable, injuries that will not endure to be mentioned. Such is the one you have committed on the man who would have *died* to save you."

This letter, postscript, italics, and all, is a typical example of the kind of correspondence which is called feminine, but which is no more confined to the intercourse of women than are many other things which the language of society appropriates to them. The belligerents made it up, we need hardly say, and were soon as warm friends as before.

The dawn of the French Revolution, which was the great event of the time, and to which the historian in every sphere must perforce return again and again, had an even greater effect upon Godwin and his friends than it had upon the musing and serious mind of Wordsworth. Holcroft had already some acquaintance with France, and no doubt had drawn in a little of the contagion of those opinions which had leavened French society, and made it possible for Figaro, with his free comments, to be listened to and applauded; and as the tide of Revolution rose a great excitement rose within the bosoms of those eager thinkers and observers scattered over London. One of the smaller singers of the time, Helen Maria Williams—who in her youth had figured in Dr. Johnson's society, one of the ladies with whom he drank innumerable cups of tea—and who had even held some correspondence with Burns: had lately returned from a residence in France, where she had known many of the philosophers and revolutionaries, and at her lodging in London the men of the little society would meet and talk as name after name came uppermost. The enthusiasm which Wordsworth has described was swelling everywhere—

"Good was it in that dawn to be alive,  
And to be young was very heaven!"

For was it not the sunrise of freedom, and of a universal bettering of mankind and purifying of the world? Now at last, for the first time, the chains and trammels imposed upon the race by tyranny and unjust laws being thrown off, was the world to gain assurance of what man was, how noble, how generous, how largely endowed. Godwin and his friends were no longer young, but their political opinions were all the stronger and more rigid from the absence of that fluid atmosphere of youth; and if they had less chance of seeing the complete and glorious renovation of everything earthly which was about to take place, they were still young enough to lend a helping hand to its completion. They formed themselves into a club of Revolutionists—before which it is curious to hear one of its members preach, at a city meeting-house, with some inaugural services of a religious character—and exchanged addresses and congratulations with the French leaders. The letters of this obscure knot of petty citizens, with scarcely one name of any note among them, to the men who had seized the very helm of State and were masters for the time of the fortunes of a great nation, are wonderful in their calm assumption of equal importance and similar hopes: and still more amazing is the didactic verbosity with which they address their compliments to the Convention. “So admirable and illustrious an example cannot be lost,” is the language of one letter; “the proceedings of the people of France will secure tranquillity and all the virtues of patriotism to themselves, and a dawn of justice and moderation to surrounding nations.”

It is curious that while we are thus informed on every side of the excitement and enthusiasm caused by the Revolution, we have so little opportunity of judging of the impression produced by the blood and horror that so soon followed that wonderful dawn of promise. Wordsworth alone unfolds the alarmed pause and tremor of

spirit, the shock and pang of disappointment which had so great an effect upon his mind. That there remained in England, notwithstanding all that happened, a strong party opposed to all hostile intervention on the part of England, which considered the declaration of war which followed as a sort of national crime, and whose faith in the ultimate justice of the French cause was strong enough to live through the Terror itself, is evident; but we have to trust to our imagination to picture forth what were the feelings with which English sympathisers must have looked on while the new-born Freedom rolled her garments in blood, and all the frenzies of a mad populace were displayed before high heaven. In the case of political partisans and philosophers, the effect no doubt was less than that produced on younger and simpler enthusiasts, and there is no evidence that Godwin, for instance, was moved by it at all.

In the meantime, these English sympathisers had a little excitement of their own. Twelve members of the Revolutionist Club, of whom Holcroft was one, were indicted in London for high treason, as Muir and Palmer had been in Scotland. Godwin was not included in the number, for he was not given to violent speech, and consistently disapproved in his calm philosophy of all violent action; but he appeared instantly in print on their behalf, describing the accusation against them as "an attempt to take away the lives of men by a constructive treason, and out of many points, no one of which was capital, to compose a capital crime." If there was, however, any intention on the part of the Government to hang or behead this group of intellectual rebels, which seems extremely unlikely, it was at once balked by the jury, which acquitted the first brought before them. Holcroft, who had delivered himself up when he heard of the prosecution, unnecessarily, and with a somewhat melodramatic determination

to identify himself and not accept the loophole of escape held out to him by the unwilling judge before whom he appeared—was kept for a week or two in Newgate awaiting the trial which, so far as he was concerned, never came. He supposed that he was the object of a more subtle prosecution afterwards, that his plays failed, and theatrical managers and audiences were prejudiced against him by the Government and its myrmidons. Whether this was the case or not it is now impossible to tell: but it might well enough be that the public, frightened to death by all that was going on in France, and full of the same unreasoning prejudice which in Edinburgh believed an innocent gentlewoman to decapitate chickens (by way of practice) with a toy guillotine, might for this reason have turned against the candidate for its favour.

Godwin, however, shaped his political utterance in a different way. When his more excitable associates were getting themselves into notoriety by noisy defiances of the Government, he was evolving in his steady yet fantastic brain his theory of what he called Political Justice. It was a theory extremely captivating to the mind of his time, to which Political Freedom was the last great discovery, a principle from which every good was to spring. Godwin's conception of Justice as the ruling principle of government was another name for absolute and boundless freedom. All laws, of whatsoever kind, all natural prepossessions, such as the preference which it is usual for a man to entertain for the members of his individual family, every restrictive power of government, every penalty exacted for the infringement of law, were breaches of this fundamental principle—as was also the idea of property and bonds of every kind, social or spiritual. In creating a duty according to this theory, you created a wrong, and the sole rule of perfection was that every man should do what was right in his own eyes. Rousseau had given the

world to understand that all government was founded on a Social Contract, the bargain by which men gave up a little of their natural freedom for the protection of law, and security of their lives and possessions. But Godwin abjured this expedient, and denounced all possessions, all securities, everything that involved the infringement of another's right to do what he pleased, as contrary to the supreme sway of justice. All law for him was wrong. He was no revolutionary: violence of any kind was out of his thoughts: he disapproved even, or at least was disposed to discountenance, all sudden changes. But in his decent obscurity, in the humdrum life and surroundings, where he lived "indifferent honest," paying his way, infringing no law—this was his philosophical settlement of the complicated affairs of earth. It extended to every rule of the family as well as the State. "Marriage is law, and the worst of laws," he says: for naturally there is nothing which interferes in so fundamental a way with personal freedom. "Marriage is an affair of property, and the worst of all properties." It was, therefore, such a breach of justice as the human race ought not to endure. Education, in like manner, was an infringement of justice, since it was, he thought, "no more legitimate to make boys slaves than to make men so. No creature in human form will be expected to learn anything but because he desires it." Thus, his theory of absolute right was to liberate man from every chain of duty and every rule of law, to abolish force and punishment, and to leave to every individual the undisturbed privilege of doing what he pleased. "Give to a State liberty enough" is his crowning sentiment, "and it is impossible that sin should exist in it."

We are apt to believe that men who profess such principles do so in the interests of the lawless and criminal, and that a desire to shake off the bonds of morality is at



the bottom of every such system. But it would be doing injustice to Godwin to suppose this. He married his own wife honestly and fairly, notwithstanding his opinions: and those who make it a reproach to him that at a later period he insisted, contrary to his own system, on securing his daughter's rights and that of her child to future wealth and position by this very expedient of marriage which he had condemned, forget that he had adopted it in his own case, and had not shown any inclination to live without the sanction required by the existing code of the country. He was, indeed, one of those unusual though not altogether singular men, who are able to set forth and reason out to its logical (however impossible) end, the most deeply reaching and universally applicable philosophy, without feeling themselves under any practical necessity either to embrace it themselves or to apply it to others. He was no missionary. He asked no man to act upon what he said, nor did he feel impelled to act upon it himself. His theory was independent of any of those limits which must have been imposed upon it, had the need of making it practicable occurred to him.

And at the same time, it is only just to add, that the real soul of his theory and that which commended it to enthusiast minds, was not the opening to universal license which it seemed to admit, but the generosity of virtue which it made possible, and the boundless trust in human nature which it set forth. "Impossible that vice should exist" in a State if it had but "liberty enough"? Mankind, universally, in its graver moments, knowing itself, has but one opinion as to the folly of such a sentiment. But, notwithstanding, it was and is a beautiful sentiment, full of chivalrous and magnanimous feeling, and the poetry of that faith in Man, the image of God, which has inspired more or less all great movements. The philosophy which is in fashion in our own day has taken a completely

different turn, and knows of nothing but Law, rigid and unalterable, a system of which man is the puppet. But Godwin's theory was founded upon a lofty, if entirely overweening estimate of the power, independence, and natural virtue of mankind. Left entirely to his own instincts, to his own sense of what was good and what bad, undemoralised by fictitious restraints, judging for himself, guided by himself, it was a fine and noble idea that man would at once reach a state of high and voluntary virtue. His capacity for this, nay, the certainty that if left to himself he would prove his possession of every noble quality, was at the bottom of all those impassioned claims of right, and assertions of universal liberty, which were the language of the time; and a passionate faith in human nature, a faith far superior to all teachings, either of reason or experience, was its inspiration. It does not seem necessary, however, to such a mind as Godwin's that he should even have possessed this faith. His passionless intelligence wrought out his theory without any concern for its application or practical use. It was a matter of logic to him, and fundamental truth. For his own part, he did nothing to disturb the constitution of existing things, had no objection to shape his course by it—and while laying down one law, obeyed another with great composure and unbroken phlegm, notwithstanding that he had that moment denounced it as a wrong to humankind. "I never for a moment," he says, "ceased to disapprove of mob government and violence, and the impulses which men, collected together in multitudes, produce on each other. I desired such political changes only as should flow purely from the clear light of the understanding, and the erect and generous feelings of the heart."

To "place the principles of politics on an immovable basis," and to supply "a less faulty work" than that of

Montesquieu, was Godwin's professed purpose in the composition of this work, and it was evidently the subject of much discussion and expectation among the congenial minds surrounding him. During the year 1792 he describes himself as being "in the singular position of an author, possessing some degree of fame for a work still unfinished and unseen." When it was published, however, a theory so novel and extraordinary met with somewhat harsh criticism even from the hands of those with whom the author had taken counsel, and with whom he had reasoned, if not of "Fate—free-will, foreknowledge absolute," and the ways of God to man, yet upon the subjects which had replaced these; "self-love, sympathy, and perfectibility, individual and general . . . justice and disinterest." The same journal which informs us of the perpetual talks and discussions on these subjects, in which the philosophical friends indulged, records also the unkind reception his system of thought met with from them. "Horne Tooke tells me my book is a bad book, and will do a great deal of harm," he says. "Holcroft . . . said the book was written with very good intentions, but, to be sure, nothing could be more foolish." These were two of the Revolutionists whom Godwin stood stoutly by when they were arrested on the imposing charge of high treason, and their criticism must have had a Brutus-touch of unexpectedness. But there were many consolatory evidences of sympathy and approval to restore the author's confidence, and he would seem even to have been able to persuade himself that his views were popular, as will appear from the following note:—

"In October I went into Warwickshire on a visit to Dr. Parr, who had earnestly sought the acquaintance and intimacy of the author of *Political Justice*. My position on these occasions was a singular one; there was not a person almost in town or village who had any acquaintance with modern publications that had not heard

of the *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*, or that was not acquainted in a great or small degree with the contents of that work. I was nowhere a stranger. The doctrines of that work (though, if any book ever contained the dictates of an independent mind, mine might pretend to do so) coincided in a great degree with the sentiments then prevailing in English society, and I was everywhere received with curiosity and kindness. If temporary fame was ever an object worthy to be coveted by the human mind, I certainly obtained it in a degree that has seldom been exceeded."

It is difficult to believe that any appreciable amount of general approval could be given to such a theory at any time, but as a matter of fact this publication, which affronted all the world's prejudices and most people's convictions, had the sanction of that prosaic but very real test, profit, to justify its author's idea of its popularity. Godwin received no less a sum than seven hundred pounds for his treatise, and it made him very widely and generally known, creating much interest and some enthusiasm. "We are told," says a contemporary, "that the poorest mechanics were known to club subscriptions for its purchase;" and even such an authority as Southey declares that, "faulty as it is in many parts, there is a mass of truth in it that must make every man think." "No work in our time," says Hazlitt, "gave such a blow to the philosophical mind of the country;" and the same authority speaks of its author as blazing "like a sun in the firmament of reputation—no one more talked of, more looked up to, more sought after." It is while recording, twenty-five years later, the entire overthrow of this reputation that the essayist describes—with no doubt some exaggeration—its extent and power.

"Was it for this that our young gowmsmen of the greatest expectation and promise—versed in classic lore, skilful in dialectics, armed at all points for the foe, well read, well nurtured, well provided for—left the University and the prospect of lawn sleeves, tearing asunder the shackles of the free-born spirit and the cobwebs of school divinity, to throw themselves at the feet of the new Gam-

alieu and learn wisdom from him? Was it for this that students at the bar, acute, inquisitive, sceptical (here only wild enthusiasts), neglected for a while the paths of preferment and the law as too narrow, tortuous, and unseemly to bear the pure and broad light of reason? Was it for this that students in medicine missed their way to lectureships and the top of their profession, deeming lightly of the health of the body and dreaming only of the renovation of society and the march of the mind? Was it for this, etc. etc., that Mr. Godwin himself sat with arms folded, and 'like Cato gave his little Senate laws'? or rather like Prospero, uttered syllables that, with their enchanted breath, were to change the world, and might almost stop the stars in their courses?"

This hyperbole, worthy of one of the chief members of the Cockney school, who has himself dropped into the mists of forgetfulness, is no doubt very extravagant. "The young gownsmen" who threw themselves at Godwin's feet are represented to us by no more (and at the same time no less) than young Shelley, who long after, in the flush of youthful caprice and contradiction, flung himself body and soul into the city shop and back parlour, to which by that time the philosopher had retired; the other youths who formed this enthusiastic train, resolve themselves into a few unknown and luckless lads, whose names appear in the list of Godwin's correspondents, but nowhere else. Still there is no doubt that this strange essay in revolutionary philosophy attracted far more notice and comment than philosophical essays even of the highest pretensions are apt to attain.

A year after the publication of the *Political Justice*, Godwin produced *Caleb Williams*, the work by which he is now most generally known. This extraordinary book has had a career—if we may use such a word in reference to a book—as extraordinary as itself. The subject is painful, and destitute of all the usual attractions of romance; the characters are vague and abstract, embodied principles rather than men (for women do not exist in its pages); and the style, though clear and lucid, has no

special charm to fascinate the reader. Yet it has held its place from that time to this with the most curious tenacity, and could not be left out of any record of literature, though probably not a tenth part of the reading public has ever seen a page of it. It has stamped itself upon its age in all its harsh and unattractive force, and cannot be ignored. It is the parent of Mrs. Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and possessed of something of the same weird fascination. From beginning to end it is the conflict of two minds which is brought before us—the one in desperate defence of a terrible secret, the other inquisitive and prying till he has discovered it, and pursued by the consequences of his discovery afterwards as by an implacable fate. The story is in all likelihood known to the reader, though he may never have met with the book. Falkland, a vague Grandison of a sterner type, without any love-making on his hands, and of small stature,—a curious departure from the recognised type of hero, which embodies every excellence, physical as well as moral,—attracts the warmest admiration and affection of Caleb Williams, the orphan youth whom he takes into his house and establishes as his secretary and favourite. Yet nevertheless when the young man hears the tale of a crime in which Falkland's name had been momentarily entangled, a suspicion immediately springs up in his bosom that this and nothing else is the secret of his master's melancholy. Falkland is a man of fortune and character—a *preux chevalier* of spotless honour, honest and generous, the champion of the poor, and the refuge of afflicted merit of every kind. The only shadow which has crossed his path is that caused by the mysterious murder of a man who had been his persistent enemy and rival, and who had just insulted him in the most unpardonable way before meeting his death. Before, however, suspicion has had time to form against him, Falk-

land defies and confronts it by demanding an instant investigation, and by producing what seem to be triumphant proofs of his innocence, which is soon after established beyond all possibility of doubt by the conviction of a farmer and his son, whom the murdered man had treated most cruelly, and whose guilt is brought home to them by the most conclusive proofs of circumstantial evidence. When this story is told to Caleb Williams, notwithstanding his profound veneration for his employer, the question, What if Falkland were the murderer after all? flashes across his mind and will not be shut out. The instant consciousness of the lad's suspicion, which the reader is allowed to perceive in Falkland, converts him immediately to Caleb's opinion, and the short but exciting conflict of curiosity on the one side and fierce fear and self-defence on the other, has a painful interest which it is impossible to resist. But before the struggle has gone far, Falkland has been wound to such a pitch of agony, that, finding Caleb on the eve of investigating a certain chest, in which it is to be supposed the proofs of his crime are hidden, he suddenly brings the situation to a close by confessing that Caleb's guess is right, and that he is indeed, notwithstanding that the luckless Hawkins has died for it, the murderer of Tyrrel. This striking incident has given its name to the drama founded upon Godwin's tale, which still retains its interest, and has reappeared upon the stage in very recent days, the *Iron Chest*.

The rest of the tale is occupied by Falkland's deadly and relentless pursuit of the youth to whom he has thus been forced to unbosom himself, and whom he overwhelms with false accusations, imprisons, pursues, forces out of every refuge in which he has hid himself, until at last the unfortunate young man is driven to the point of denouncing his persecutor. That all this time Caleb

should retain his affection for his master, and consider his secret as inviolable, seemed quite natural to the reader as to the victim, whose faith in his former benefactor is scarcely even shaken by the fact that he has been guilty of one cowardly murder and has permitted two innocent people to die in his stead; and this, it is needless to say, infers a wonderful amount of power in the carrying out of the strange story. When the unfortunate Caleb, apprehended a second time on a false charge, and seeing himself on the verge of a hopeless imprisonment, bursts forth at last with his accusation, he is overwhelmed by remorse before he gets to the end of it, and the conflict of fine sentiment between him, the accuser, and Falkland, who, worn and emaciated, has come to hear the charge against him, is kept up to the end. "Mr. Falkland is of a noble nature," cries the young man when he has told his extraordinary and incredible story, at which all the assembly is gaping; "I proclaim to all the world that Mr. Falkland is a man worthy of affection and kindness, and that I am myself the basest and most odious of mankind." The criminal whose guilt he has just denounced is not to be outdone in high-flown generosity: "He rose from his seat, supported by his attendants, and to my infinite astonishment threw himself into my arms. 'Williams,' he said, 'you have conquered; I see too late the greatness and elevation of your mind:'" and determined not to outlive his reputation he dies, leaving his accuser in agonies of remorse.

The struggle thus terminated is the sole subject of the tale, for the story of Tyrrel and the events which led to his murder are merely reported to Caleb, and are of the slightest and most conventional description, without a touch of human nature or individuality. Nor is there one character in the book which can be said to take hold upon the reader. The hero and his adversary are abstrac-



tions, representatives on one side of what the author supposes an elevated sense of honour, and on the other of intellectual curiosity. It is little recommendation to the public to say of a work of fiction that it embodies a philosophical theory, and probably very few who read the book now have the remotest idea what the principle was which it is intended to set forth—but nothing can be more distinct, when the attention is directed to it, than the meaning of the writer in this extraordinary tale. With a curious artlessness, as in a child's fable, he sets forth his moral: the fact that punishment must follow crime is the wrong upon which everything turns. But for this Falkland would have repented of his murder in a gentlemanly way becoming his character, and all would have been well; it is the existence of a degrading penalty, which he cannot endure to contemplate, which compels him to permit the execution of the two innocent victims, and to shower miseries upon the unfortunate Caleb Williams, who has no desire to denounce him, but whose "elevation and greatness of mind" he does not appreciate till the end. Caleb himself feels to his heart the mistake he has made in letting loose the terrors of the law upon the magnanimous and noble sufferer—a step which is alien to all his intentions, and to which he is driven only by desperation. The evils of judicial interference with the natural progress of the mind are brought in over and over again in the minor details of the picture. The scene in the prison, where Caleb is placed by Falkland on a false charge of robbery, has none of the riot and reckless jollity which other writers of the day put into the same scenes. Each prisoner is overwhelmed with "his own internal anguish," and if a brawl does occur among them, it fades into speedy silence amid the preoccupied and thoughtful felons. "We talk of instruments of torture," cries the narrator; "Englishmen take credit to themselves

for having banished the use of them from their happy shore. Alas! he that has observed the secrets of a prison well knows there is more torture in the lingering existence of a criminal, in the silent intolerable minutes that he spends, than in the tangible misery of whips and racks." On another occasion Caleb finds refuge with a romantic band of robbers, who act on the Robin Hood principle of taking solely from the rich and helping the poor. "I saw and respected their good qualities and their virtues," he says: "I was by no means inclined to believe them worse men or more hostile in their dispositions to the welfare of their species than the generality of those that look down upon them with the most censure." And Mr. Raymond, the head of this virtuous band, makes it clear, considering the question with great impartiality, that he and his followers are more sinned against than sinning.

"Those very laws," he tells the hero, "which by a perception of their iniquity drove me to what I am, preclude my return. God, we are told, judges men by what they are at the period of arraignment, and whatever be their views, if they have seen and abjured the folly of their crimes, receives them to favour. But the institutions of countries that profess to worship this God admit no such distinctions. They leave no room for amendment, and seem to have a brutal delight in confounding the demerits of offenders. It signifies not what is the character of the individual at the hour of trial—how changed, how spotless, how useful, avails him nothing. Am I not compelled to go on in folly, having once begun?"

The virtuous steward Collins, who is almost the only amiable character in the story, expresses his benevolent sentiments in strict accordance with this rule. "It is more necessary for me to feel compassion for you than that I should accumulate your misfortune by my censures. I regard you as vicious, but I do not consider the vicious as proper objects of indignation and scorn," he says. Thus the author of the *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* never loses sight of his theory.

*St. Leon*, which was Godwin's second novel, has not shared the curious immortality of *Caleb Williams*, nor does it in the least deserve to do so. It has something of the same connection, but in a different sense, with the *Political Justice*, which was ever uppermost in his thoughts, and owed its complexion, if not its existence, to Godwin's desire to modify the philosophical disapproval of the domestic affections and family life which had been expressed in that book. *St. Leon* is a French nobleman of the sixteenth century who dissipates his means, and is saved and converted into the *père noble* of a melodrama by the exertions of his wife: but after living a life of virtuous poverty with her and a group of sons and daughters, perfect both in mind and person, has the fatal secrets of the philosopher's stone and the elixir vitæ communicated to him, and loses everything that makes life worth having, by becoming rich and immortal. The wife, Marguerite, who is his guardian angel, is said to be "drawn from the character of Mary Wollstonecraft," but the reader who braves the dust and cobwebs to look into the history of *St. Leon* will, we fear, find little help in identifying any human creature by means of this immaculate wife, who is a piece of perfection, and not reducible by any means to a human resemblance. The story is painful and monotonous, and few people, we think, will follow *St. Leon* to the end of his tale.

Godwin's later works were many—some of them not written under his own name, and most of them for daily bread, but without anything of the inspiration which necessity sometimes confers. His *Political Justice* has a certain place in the history of his time, and *Caleb Williams* retains a tradition of interest, the surviving shadow of that which it once excited: but this is almost all that can be said of a writer who once occupied so noticeable a place in the literary world. During his

own lifetime, according to Hazlitt, his friend and contemporary, he had fallen as completely from that place as if it had never been his. "Mr. Godwin's person is not known, he is not pointed out in the street, his conversation is not courted, his opinions are not asked, he has no train of admirers, no one thinks it worth his while to traduce and vilify him, he has scarcely friend or foe, the world makes a point (as Goldsmith used to say) of taking no more notice of him than if such an individual had never existed; he is to all ordinary intents dead and buried." But the strong individuality of the two works we have quoted, and his personal history and connections, will make his name always a known word. The husband of Mary Wollstonecraft and the father of Mary Shelley, his life is the centre of many branching lines which connect him with the higher circles of his time, as well as the city society to which he immediately belonged; and his steady clerkly presence, methodical and hard working, his tradesman-like adherence, amid the wildest views, to the routine and method which in principle he scorned, the tremendous revolutionism of his ideas, and the plodding and humdrum prose of his life, afford contrasts enough to give us a kind of paradoxical interest in the shopkeeping philosopher, with his small person and his large head full of notions, his sober and drab-coloured life, and the strange associations that cluster round it. Associated with that of his wife, his name became to many of his countrymen a synonym for atheism and every unruly passion; and the strange and painful story of his household might be taken to prove how little consonant with a virtuous and peaceful life were the principles on which his family was founded; but when we look at the man closer, and through the medium of Mr. Paul's able biography make acquaintance with the faded fortunes and forgotten tenor of that curious exist-

ence, the traditionary prejudice with which he has been regarded will be much modified, although there is little that is lovable or attractive in the story in what light soever it may be regarded.

Godwin was already within the boundaries of middle-age when Mary Wollstonecraft, a name which has been hated and contemned on all hands as that of one of the typical representatives of feminine Atheism, the most odious of all characters to the general mind—came into his life. She was a woman who had already experienced many hard struggles and much sorrow. She had been in some degree the bread-winner, in every way the support and guide of a family, neither so amenable to her influence nor so grateful for her exertions as would have been seemly, the members of which were in the habit of criticising their sister somewhat sharply in the letters which passed between them behind her back. Her father was an entirely disreputable person, from whom his children derived neither help nor countenance. To be brought up under such a shadow, or rather to struggle towards a better and higher life, in the depressing presence of a hopeless and degraded parent, is the breeding of all others which most revolts the mind of a high-spirited girl. Indeed, we might almost venture to say that the strong protestations in favour of something, varying from age to age, which is called the Rights of Women, with which society has been vexed and disturbed to an extent which has made it incapable of judging what is just in them—have risen almost invariably from women compelled by hard stress of circumstances to despise the men about them. Exception will probably be taken to this assertion both by the women themselves who utter these protestations and by the critics; but yet we hold by what we have said. Women, no more than men, are exempt from the painful action of contempt; but when

they are obliged to despise those to whom they would naturally look up, the irritation and misery of the sentiment is magnified tenfold. To say that her drunken father was the reason why Mary Wollstonecraft wrote the *Rights of Women* would be too strong an accusation ; but this circumstance evidently brought a painful struggle into her life. And one of her sisters, the pretty one, the beauty of the family, "poor Bess," made an unhappy marriage, and had to be taken out of her husband's clutches almost in a state of frenzy by Mary herself. Thus degraded by the besotted folly of one man, and driven into energetic action by the unkindness of another, she certainly was. And it was not till after nearly ten years' experience of the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" that she put forth the book which was the first word of a long controversy. For the greater part of that time she had been engaged in teaching, and when in 1787 she came to London to "a little house in a street near Blackfriars Bridge" to endeavour, with the favour of good Mr. Johnson, the publisher, to get her living by translations from the French and little books for children, she was a woman nearly thirty, at an age when the deprivations of life and the "spurns which patient merit of the unworthy takes" are felt most keenly. Here she made a home for her brothers and sisters, supported her father in his village, and was the head of all the 'family concerns ; and it was here that the *Vindication of the Rights of Women* was produced.

The woman who wrote this book was not an abstract personage, or one of the class which is called strong-minded. "She was incapable of disguise. Whatever was the state of her mind, it appeared when she entered. When harassed, which was very often the case, she was relieved by unbosoming herself, and generally returned home calm, frequently in spirits," writes her publisher,

Johnson. The sisters were flippant and impatient, and not dutiful to Mary's sway, though they came upon her in all their troubles. It was she who found them situations, sent one of them to Paris to improve her French, and generally cared for and watched over them. The woman who stands in this position to a family has, alas! a great deal of disenchantment to go through, and is taught the meanness that dependence produces, and the ingratitude of many which is so often the result of the self-devotion of one, in a bitter and effectual way. The disreputable father, the troublesome brothers, the brother-in-law who drove "poor Bess" to madness, were all, no doubt, before her proud and sensitive soul, in her mind's eye, as she wrote her book—she, too, amid the literary drudgery by which she earned her living, hoping to do something which should move the world and give a new tide to popular opinion.

We have said that society is too much vexed and irritated even yet by this subject to be able to permit it to be discussed with calmness: and still more was this the case in the end of last century, when for the first time a woman ventured to complain of the inequality of her lot. But, indeed, though the time permitted a simplicity of language not possible in our day, Mary Wollstonecraft's plea for women is of the mildest description. "She vindicates their right to be considered as human creatures, bound by the general laws of truth and honour, and with a generous vehemence assails the sentimental teachings of Rousseau and of the more virtuous moralists—Gregory, Fordyce, and even Mrs. Chapone—who take it for granted that the highest mission of a woman is "to please," and excuse in her, nay, recommend to her, those arts by which she can govern while appearing to obey. All that Mary Wollstonecraft asks is education for her clients and an exemption from that

false and mawkish teaching specially addressed to "the fair," in which the eighteenth century was so rich, and which has not quite died out, even among ourselves. In one sentence, indeed, in her book, she "drops a hint" which she fears will probably "excite laughter;" "for I really think that women ought to have representation instead of being arbitrarily governed;" but this opens the whole political question to her, and she allows that as women are "as well represented" as the great proportion of men, the grievance here is small. The case, it will be seen, is very different in our own days. Those who look up the old volume in its faded printing with the hope of finding anything in it that resembles the claims of some women now, will be entirely disappointed. The question was in a much more elementary form in Mary Wollstonecraft's time. The instructors who counselled a woman never to let her husband be sure of her love for him, that so she might retain her empire over him; to "be even cautious in displaying your good sense," lest this might be thought to "assume a superiority;" and to keep any information she may possess "a profound secret, especially from men"—nay, even to show no animation in dancing, lest it should be supposed a fault against delicacy—are the objects of her indignant criticism: and no one will say she errs in denouncing the whole pitiful system of fictitious existence which was built upon such a foundation.

Nor does this feminine revolutionary suggest any violent remedy for the evil she deplures. The only thing she can think of—besides that broadest but most difficult of all panaceas, a general adoption of the principles of honest simplicity and truth—is a common education, of boys and girls together, with the object apparently of making them respect each other as brothers and sisters rather than look upon each other as hero and heroine in the brief drama whose stilted rules are supposed to affect



the life of one of them from beginning to end. Many readers of mature age (the younger generations have scarcely heard the name) will recollect when Mary Wollstonecraft was a name of horror, considered as that of a female atheist and libertine, an offence to God and man. To such it will be a surprise to find that while her book is altogether free from revolutionary principles, either political or moral, it is also full of the warmest religiousness, and appeals to the Maker, the Father of all. Here is her comment upon the remark of a sage that women might not learn the science of botany "consistently with female delicacy." "Thus," she cries, "is the fair book of knowledge to be shut with an everlasting seal. On reading similar passages, I have reverentially lifted up my eyes and my heart to Him who liveth for ever and ever, and said, 'O my Father! hast Thou by the very constitution of her nature forbid Thy child to seek Thee in the fair forms of Truth? And can her soul be sullied by the knowledge that awfully calls her to Thee?'" Such are the grievances upon which she dwells, and such the rights of women she claims. It is a curious lesson over again of the cruelty of general report and the violence of prejudice. The book would attract no attention now-a-days, unless some reader might be struck with here and there an eloquent passage. Its complaints are too mild and general, its suggestions too little revolutionary, to count in the literature of the subject. One or two gleams of character there are, as when she calls Lord Chesterfield "a cold-hearted rascal (for I love significant words)."

After her book was published she went to France, and remained in Paris during all the misery and alarm of the Reign of Terror. Her account of the King's passage through the streets to appear before the Assembly, "moving silently along—excepting now and then a few strokes on the drum which rendered the stillness more awful

—through empty streets, surrounded by the National Guards,” while the inhabitants of the houses along the way stood at their closed windows looking out upon this strange sight, is curiously impressive and picturesque. Courageous woman as she was, she was struck with a chill of fear to the bottom of her heart, and fancied she saw eyes glance at her through her glass door, and bloody hands shaken. “I wish I had kept even the cat with me,” she cries. “I want to see something alive. Death in so many frightful shapes has taken hold of my fancy.” Perhaps it was this terror and her forlorn position, alone in such a confused and horrible scene, which made her cling to the support which was offered to her. But indeed she herself would probably have put forth no such excuse nor felt any necessity for it. Like Godwin and so many of those around her, she had come to the conclusion that marriage was wrong in itself, and she was not restrained by that thought of the inevitable injury inflicted upon the woman by all irregular relations, which sometimes prevented a man of generous temper from carrying out his own convictions in this way. The generosity on the woman’s side was to scorn all dangers and run all risks. She united herself in Paris to an American called Finlay, whose faithful wife she was for about two years, when he availed himself of the freedom which the absence of the marriage bond left him, and deserted her—to the surprise and distress of the woman-philosopher, who naturally, but very unphilosophically, was heart-broken by the abandonment which it was the very point of her creed to make possible. That this freedom involved an ideal faithfulness, a constancy more than romantic, was the conclusion she would have drawn: the primary idea of all enthusiasts of Mary Wollstonecraft’s class being to credit the human race in general with this rarest and most beautiful of qualities. She was in Lon-

don with her child when this terrible event occurred, and refusing to accept the annuity which the man whom she had considered her husband would have settled on her, she returned to her former occupation and took up the broken threads of her previous life. And whether it was that the society in which she lived was deeply imbued with the same principles as her own, or that her great qualities won for her, as has been seen in other cases, an exemption from the common rule, it seems certain that Mrs. Finlay, as she called herself for some time, was received by all her friends with very little, if any, diminution of respect.

It was at this period that she met Godwin, whom she had previously known, but formed no great acquaintance with. He had not been without passages of sentiment in his life before—and he was a man of taste, liking beautiful women and women of genius. Miss Alderson, who was afterwards Mrs. Opie, one of the gentle little chorus of minor poets, was supposed to have attracted him; and Mrs. Reveley, a person of great beauty, though otherwise undistinguished, who, however, had a husband living; and the beautiful actress and author Mrs. Inchbald. But the fair and injured woman who thought more entirely with him than any of these, soon seems to have fixed his choice. Southey describes her face as “the best, infinitely the best,” that he has seen among the *literati* in London, with an air of superiority which was disagreeable, but no other drawback, and eyes “the most meaning I ever saw.” In the picture it appears an altogether noble face—pensive and with a sweet languor as of fatigue or sorrow past, but in every respect a pure and lovely countenance. Nothing could be more odd than Godwin’s description both of their love and marriage. “The partiality we conceived for each other was in that mode which I have always considered as the purest and

most refined style of love. It grew with equal advances in the mind of each. It would have been impossible for the most minute observers to have said who was before and who was after. One sex did not take the priority which long-established custom has awarded it, nor the other overstep that delicacy which is so severely imposed." "There was no period of throes and resolute explanation attendant on the tale. It was friendship melting into love." Godwin felt himself bound to explain the step he had taken to Thomas Wedgewood, the friend of Coleridge and his own, a munificent and tender-hearted benefactor of literary persons in general. Some people had accused him of inconsistency in marrying at all. "But I cannot see this," says the philosopher. "The doctrine of *Political Justice* is that an attachment in some degree permanent between two persons of opposite sexes is right, but that marriage, as practised in European countries, is wrong. I still adhere to that opinion. Nothing but a regard for the happiness of the individual whom I had no right to injure would have induced me to submit to an institution which I wish to see abandoned, and which I would recommend to my fellow-men never to practise but with the greatest caution. Having done what I thought necessary for the peace and respectability of the individual, I hold myself no otherwise bound than before the ceremony took place."

Nothing could better show the pragmatic, wrong-headed, obstinate, yet on the whole right-feeling man. His wife and he lived in two houses in "the Polygon, Somers Town," one about "twenty doors off" the other, and called upon each other and wrote notes to each other daily with the most amusing play at being lovers and not married persons. The precise date even of their marriage was not known to their friends, the two philosophers being a little ashamed of having in spite of

their principles done what everybody else did, and "submitted to an institution" which they disapproved. Then they were poor, and Mary had (it would seem) in some degree escaped the penalties of poverty so long as she remained unmarried. She was "so beloved by her friends that several, and Mr. Johnson in particular, had stood between her and any of the annoyances and mortifications of debt." This, we suppose, means that they paid her debts for her, which was a thing they could not continue to do for Godwin's wife—while he, on the other hand, had no desire to advertise himself as a married man for still more delicate reasons. "It is usual that when a man marries he commences new habits under such a totally new influence, and that he is lost to all his former friends. Mr. Godwin spent a portion of every day in society, and was much beloved; his more intimate friends believed they should suffer from the change. *Two ladies shed tears when he announced his marriage—Mrs. Inchbald and Mrs. Reveley.*" These exquisite explanations are from the pen of Mrs. Shelley, the daughter of this pair, and are given in perfect good faith and gravity. It is to the credit of both parties, however, that, notwithstanding all these inducements to keep it secret, the marriage was made known very shortly after it was contracted. The notes that passed between them in the meantime are pretty and playful enough, and show the most curious kind of united yet separate life. It might be a good experiment for impatient and fanciful people to make, to live thus "twenty doors off" or round the corner. "Did I not see you, friend Godwin, at the theatre last night?" his wife asks. "I thought I met a smile, but you went out without looking round. . . . I shall leave home about two o'clock. I tell you so lest you should call after that hour. I do not think of visiting you, because I seem inclined to be industrious. I

believe I feel affectionate to you in proportion as I am in spirits, still I must not dally with you when I can do anything else. . . . Should you call and find only books, have a little patience and I shall be with you. Do not give Fanny a cake to-day; I am afraid she stayed too long with you yesterday. You are to dine with me on Monday, remember; the salt beef awaits your pleasure." Sometimes, however, she is a little cross, and wishes he would desire Mr. Marshal, a useful friend of all work, whom Godwin seems to have kept about him, to call on her. "Mr. Johnson or somebody has always taken the disagreeable business of settling with tradespeople off my hands," she says with an aggrieved tone. "I am perhaps as unfit as yourself to do it, and my time appears to me as valuable as that of other persons accustomed to employ themselves." Here there is a little of the petulance of the beauty and queen of hearts, as well as of the conscious woman of genius, who has learned to expect to be exempted from the vulgarities of daily existence. But when Godwin is absent on a journey, their letters to each other are very natural and delightful. "And now, my dear love, what do you think of me?" he writes. "Do you not find solitude infinitely superior to the company of a husband? Will you give me leave to return to you again when I have finished my pilgrimage? . . . I wish I knew of some sympathy which could inform me from moment to moment how you do, and what you feel. Tell Fanny something about me. Ask where she thinks I am. Tell her I have not forgotten her little mug, and that I shall choose her a very pretty one." To this Mary replies from the Polygon. "I find you ever write the kind of letter a friend ought to write, and give an account of your movements. I hailed the sunshine and moonlight, and travelled with you scenting the fragrant gale. Enable me still to be your company, and I will enable

you to peep over my shoulder and see me under the shade of my green blind, thinking of you and all I am to hear and feel when you return. You may read my heart if you will. I am not fatigued with solitude, yet I have not relished my solitary dinner. A husband is a convenient part of the furniture of a house, unless he be a clumsy fixture. I wish you from my soul to be riveted in my heart, but I do not desire to have you always at my elbow, although at this moment I should not care if you were. . . . Fanny forgets not the mug."

This is all far too pretty and tender for two abstract philosophers who disapproved of marriage; and notwithstanding the portentous reputation of the author of the *Rights of Women*, there is nothing she writes which does not attract us towards the woman who, though she so little knew it, was but a few months from her grave. She died after the birth of her child, another Mary, she who was to be the love and wife of Shelley in after years. In Godwin's concise and business-like diary, where, even when his wife is very ill, he pauses to note "Pichegru arrested," there is one break, "10 seconds 20 minutes before 8——" and then some blank lines. His wife was dead.

But in its sorrow as in its happiness this literary community cannot help being tragi-comic. The very day of his wife's death Godwin began the most curious wrangle with Mrs. Inchbald—over her grave, so to speak. "My wife died at eight this morning," he wrote; "I always thought you used her ill, but I forgive you. You told me you did not know her. You have a thousand good and great qualities. She had a very deep-rooted admiration for you." To which the lady replies the same day with the greatest spirit, "You have shocked me beyond expression, yet I bless God, without exciting the smallest portion of remorse. Yet I feel most delicately on every

subject in which the good or ill of my neighbours is involved. I did not know her. I never wished to know her. Against my desire you made us acquainted. With what justice I shunned her your present note evinces, for she judged me harshly. . . . Be comforted ; you *will* be comforted. Still I feel for you at present." Next day she wrote again with the most curious philosophy of consolation which we ever remember to have encountered. It is thus Mrs. Inchbald offers the comfort of her own experience to her friend, whose wife had been taken from him the day before :—

"I have too much humility to offer consolation to a mind like yours. I will only describe sensations which nearly a similar misfortune excited in me. I felt myself for a time bereft of every comfort the world could bestow ; but these opinions passed away, and gave place to others, almost the reverse. I was separated from the only friend I had in the world, and by circumstances so much more dreadful than those which have occurred to you, as the want of warning increases all our calamities ; but yet I have lived to think with indifference of all I then suffered."

These are very probably the experiences of many, but few have the courage to express them with such composure. Two days later Godwin resumed this strange correspondence, some special slight shown by Mrs. Inchbald to his wife having apparently come uppermost in his mind, curiously mingled with a hankering after that lady herself. "I must endeavour to be understood as to the unworthy behaviour with which I charge you towards my wife," he says. "I think your shuffling behaviour about the taking places to the comedy of the 'Will' disgraceful to you. I think your conversation with her that night at the play base, cruel, and insulting. There were persons in the box who heard it, and they thought as I do. I think you know more of my wife than you are willing to acknowledge to yourself, and that you have an understanding capable of doing some small degree of justice to



her merits. I think you should have had magnanimity and self-respect enough to have showed this. . . . I thank you for your attempt at consolation in your letter of yesterday. It was considerate and well intended, although its consolations are entirely alien to my heart." All this went on while the poor woman lay unburied—a curious warfare of mingled praise and recriminations, notes like arrows flying from house to house, as so lately poor Mary's little notes had flown. "I could refute any charge you allege against me," Mrs. Inchbald retorts. . . . "As the short and very slight acquaintance I had with Mrs. Godwin, and into which I was reluctantly impelled by you, has been productive of petty suspicions and revilings, surely I cannot sufficiently applaud my own penetration in apprehending, and my own firmness in resisting, a longer and more familiar acquaintance." A more extraordinary correspondence never was carried on at such a moment. It ended a month after with a brief declaration on the part of Mrs. Inchbald that their acquaintance must end *for ever*. Probably, had she been less energetic, Godwin would have asked her to marry him a few months later, which seems the only other alternative.

There is one other curious little controversy over this grave. One of the friends of Godwin and his wife declined to be present at her funeral, because he much doubted "the morality of assisting at religious ceremonies," to which objection Godwin sent the following curious reply:—

"I think the last respect due to the best of human beings ought not to be deserted by their friends. There is not, perhaps, an individual in my list whose opinions are not as adverse to religious ceremonies as your own, and who might not with equal propriety shrink from and desert the remains of the first of women. I honour your character. I respect your scruples. But I should have thought more highly of you if, at such a moment, it had been impossible for so cold a reflection to have crossed your mind."

It would not appear that Mary had ever shared her husband's entire want of religious faith: she believed, at least, in the existence of God; but it is strange to note that this man, who had married in spite of his principles, should now, in the midst of a company all adverse to religious ceremonies, have buried his wife with the specially solemn and striking ceremonial which the Church of England employs. But we go too far: Mary, it is true, was buried, as ordinary Christians are: but her husband was "too prostrate both in body and mind," though he had been equal to the writing of all these letters, to be present himself on the occasion.

This was in September 1797. In March of the following year he was in Bath, and there made the acquaintance of two sisters, Sophia and Harriet Lee, who were among the most popular novelists of their time. The elder sister had been a well-known author for many years and had long before established a school, after the fashion of Hannah More and her sisters, in Bath, where the Misses Lee were the ornaments of one of those little centres of literary society to which we have alluded in a former chapter. Harriet Lee, who was considerably younger than Sophia, had but lately begun her literary career when Godwin visited Bath. She was the author of by far the greater part of the series entitled the *Canterbury Tales*, of which the first volumes had just been published. These tales have fallen out of the knowledge of the present generation, but they were highly thought of by their contemporaries, and one of them is spoken of by no less an admirer than Byron with real enthusiasm. "It may be said to contain the germ of much that I have since written," he said. It was only a year after the acknowledgment of Godwin's marriage with "the first of women," and she had not been six months dead — when he formed this new acquaintance. It was some-

what early for a new sentiment, but the steady and argumentative way in which he immediately sits down to argue Harriet Lee into marrying him, is one of the most curious of the many characteristic episodes in his life. The lady resisted, perhaps not without a little enjoyment of the prolonged and delicate controversy, such as any novel writer and most women might be expected to feel. But she would not have him, notwithstanding all the elaborate arguments which he brought forward to prove that she ought to have him, and the high ground he took of moral disapproval when she persisted in rejecting him. When he can say no more, he tells her that she acts in the spirit of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, putting out of sight the man, and asking only what he believes : but even this did not move her. A similar correspondence took place a year later with Mrs. Reveley, of whom it has been already told that Godwin would have married her before he met Mary Wollstonecraft, but for the trifling circumstance that she was herself married. This mistake was now, however, rectified by the death of Mrs. Reveley's husband, and in the same month Godwin summons the new-made widow to admit him to her presence, apparently in the position of a lover, scouting indignantly the suggestion that for some time it was better that she should not see him. "Is woman always to be a slave?" he cries. A little later he puts his proposal plainly, and indeed somewhat authoritatively, before her. "You are invited to form the sole happiness of one of the most known men of the age ; of one whose principles, whose temper, whose thoughts, you have been long acquainted with, and will, I believe, confess their universal constancy. This connection, I should think, would restore you to self-respect, would give security to your future peace, and insure for you no mean degree of respectability. What you propose to choose in opposition

to this I hardly know how to describe to you." What the poor lady did choose, was to marry, after a not very long interval, somebody whom it is to be supposed she preferred to Godwin; but his intense disapproval of her on this subject, and angry sense of her folly in not immediately deciding in his own favour, are comical in the extreme. If the loves of the philosophers should ever be written,—and there is no doubt that the subject is a fertile and amusing one, instructive if not exactly edifying,—Godwin's serious setting forth of his own claims, and grave enforcement of the duty and propriety of marrying him upon the objects of his affection, and his grieved perception of their incredible folly in refusing to see this, would furnish one of its most characteristic chapters.

He married eventually in 1801, or was married by, a woman of no special pretensions—a widow with two children—Mrs. Clairmont, to whom he seems to have been for the rest of his life a faithful and even submissive husband. It was her energy and business qualifications which suggested the bookseller's shop and small publishing business, in which the last portion of his life was spent, and which was carried on chiefly by her for many years. Mrs. Godwin published not only many minor productions of her husband,—school-books and other compilations, most of them in a feigned name,—but brought out one of the prettiest of gentle interpretations—*Lamb's Tales from Shakspeare*, the work by which Mary Lamb did her best to eke out her brother's humble income, and in which he too had a share; and also *Mrs. Leicester's School*, Miss Lamb's only independent production. And here it was that young Shelley came in his enthusiasm and met the girl whose young beauty and ardent uncontrolled nature helped him to shake himself loose of other legal bonds, and brought darker shades into the fatal spider's web of passion and theory which entangled so

many lives. Godwin was very good to the children of his two marriages and of his two wives. It is one of the best features in his character; but we must return hereafter to the group of young women who grew up in his house and wove threads of connection, not happy or beautiful, between that humble shopkeeper's parlour and other names more distinguished than his own.

Godwin lived as far into the present century as the year 1836, and, strangely enough, owed the comfort of his latter days—he, the philosophical revolutionary and antagonist of law and authority—to a small sinecure office under Government. The “Yecoman Usher of the Exchequer” was the title which the author of the *Political Justice* carried to his grave—a curious mockery of fate. He pursued the profession of literature to the end of his life; but the culmination of his mind and reputation was in the last four years of the eighteenth century. It was at this period also that the stern Holcroft set his teeth against disease and pain, believing them to be within the power of the will to overcome and make an end of, as his friend believed vice and crime were to be annihilated by restoring to every man an uncontrolled and perfect freedom. The “sanguinary plot against the liberties of Englishmen”—that is, the State trial to which we have referred—came, as has been already described, to nothing, and Holcroft went on writing novels and plays, until, stung and sore at the neglect of the public, but trying hard to think himself a political martyr, he disappeared for a number of years from London, living on the Continent. The terrible story of his son's suicide gives a point of tragic interest to his life. The boy, an unruly lad of sixteen, had run away, and threatened if his father came after him to shoot himself—which he did, to the horror of all beholders, on seeing that stern father approach his hiding-place,—an appalling incident, of which,

however, nothing is said in the supplemental memoir with which Hazlitt concludes Holcroft's fragment of autobiography.

Another, but a wealthier and less laborious member of the same circle, and pseudo-martyr of the same period, Horne Tooke, had the distinction of being sent to the Tower, one scarcely knows why, since Holcroft was only in Newgate—a very invidious and injurious partiality. In connection with this individual, Rogers, in his recollections, tells a very odd anecdote of the paternal consideration of the Government for its prisoners. Tooke was kept, it appears, for a fortnight without anything to read or any writing materials, but at the end of that time three volumes were sent him—"one of Locke, one of Chaucer, and Wilkins's Essay"—books which had been found upon his table when he was arrested, and which it was afterwards supposed he must have been reading. He made notes upon the margin of the Chaucer, an old black letter copy, for his book, "The Diversions of Purley," which he published shortly after. It is a work upon philology and grammar, with a sprinkling of philosophy, and is in the form of a long dialogue between himself and Sir Francis Burdett. The philology is eccentric and old-fashioned, and the book "diverting" to its author rather than its readers: but it is very unlike a work on which a revolutionary accused of high treason was likely to have been engaged. Horne Tooke was a wit and patron of letters in his way, and took in among his associates a larger and (conventionally) more important society than that of the literary community about Holborn, the laborious hacks of the generation.

Mrs. Inchbald, who has been repeatedly mentioned, was one of the first of the school of female novelists whose heyday was yet to come. She was at this time in the full glory of her literary career, "drawing her chair into the centre of the room" wherever she went, and

gathering "the men" about her in a crowd, like a heroine of Miss Burney, though she was far too incisive and imperious for one of these gentle ladies. Her *Simple Story* is not a great work of art. It sets forth the caprices of a young lady, never known to the reader by any name more familiar than that of Miss Milner, who torments and is tormented by her guardian until they marry, and we are in hopes that a natural solution has come to all the questions between them: but, unfortunately, this hope proves without reason, as there is added a postscriptal volume, in which Miss Milner falls into dire trouble and dies, leaving a child, who is not permitted even to see her stern father. At the final crisis, when this lovely and innocent but ill-used girl falls into her father's arms, the only words he can utter in his surprise are, "Miss Milner, dear Miss Milner!" for, of course, she is the image of her mother. The character of Dorriforth is intended to be one of lofty sternness, so noble, so highly exalted above any kind of levity, that it is impossible for him to tolerate or forgive it; but the novelist has succeeded only in making him a harsh tyrant—ungenerous and untender. Oddly enough, he begins by being a Catholic priest (Mrs. Inchbald was herself a Catholic), but is freed of his vows when he succeeds to the title of a cousin, a peculiarity almost as out of the way as Miss Milner's deprivation of a Christian name. Miss Milner herself is a lively portrait of an impulsive and capricious young woman, full of good impulses, but impatient of control, who is driven into sin at last by the cold superiority and practical desertion of her husband. Like many female writers, however, Mrs. Inchbald makes this polished tyrant the object of her chief care, elevates him into the most magnanimous of heroes when he acknowledges his daughter, and repays him with the love and gratitude of the young people upon whom he has inflicted so many blows to

begin with. But there were no *Waverley Novels* in those days, no Jane Austen, no Maria Edgeworth: and the *Simple Story* was highly prized by its contemporaries. "Mrs. Inchbald was always a great favourite with me," says Hazlitt. "There is the true soul of woman breathing from what she writes as much as if you heard her voice. It is as if Venus had written books:" and he proceeds to relate how the *Simple Story* had "transported him out of himself." "I recollect walking out to escape from one of the tenderest parts," he says, "in order to return to it again with double relish. An old crazy hand-organ was playing 'Robin Adair,' a summer shower dropped manna on my head, and slaked my feverish thirst of happiness. The heroine, Miss Milner, was at my side." Perhaps it is because a great many capricious young ladies, impatient of restraint, have been introduced to us in fiction, since then, that Miss Milner touches us less than she touched Mr. Hazlitt. But nobody now-a-days suggests of a female novelist that "it is as if Venus had written books." The reader will remember how this Venus wrote to Godwin when his wife lay yet unburied. Afterwards, we find her in a letter congratulating him when one of his plays failed, on "having produced a work which will protect you from being classed with the successful dramatists of the present day!" A Venus, certainly, with a very sharp tongue. She had a hard life up to the time when one of her little plays caught the fancy of the public, and never gave up the economical habits which she acquired then. In a black gown, which had not cost more than a few shillings (one wonders in those dear days of the war, when everything was costly, what sort of a gown this could have been, or whether the description is a mere piece of masculine ignorance), she would take her place in the finest society, they say—though, to tell the truth, we do not see much trace of it in the record—and fascinate everybody



who came near her with a "face beautiful in effect and beautiful in every feature," which is her own modest description of it. "With acknowledged talents and ready social powers to make all other women jealous," says her most recent editor, "a Bohemian who wanted nothing, but still lived in her garret with virtue on twenty shillings a week . . . affectionate in nature, without passion, wholly feminine, she was amiable and lovable in an extraordinary degree." This last statement, we think, must be taken with caution. She was not an epitome of all the virtues, but a woman of a decided temper, not used to mince matters, and calling a spade a spade. But she too has gone out of the recollection of the reader, as all but the greatest are fated to go.

Mrs. Inchbald was not the only, or even the most remarkable of the female novelists who, with little ostentation or show in society, still had their successes and enjoyed them, and would occasionally with a little state and not ungraceful pedantry, and conscious but modest greatness, present themselves in a preface, like Miss Jane Porter, to explain and illustrate their work. This lady, and her sister Anna Maria, a much more voluminous writer, both flourished in London in somewhat finer regions, appearing in suburban parties, and haunts of lettered society, and enjoying a large share of popular favour, in the beginning of the century. They spent part of their childhood in Edinburgh. When Walter Scott was a youth at college he would play with these little girls, and tell them stories, a contact sufficient to awaken the powers of fancy which lurked in them. The youngest published *Artless Tales* at twelve years old, the beginning of a long but forgotten series—all of the romantic-historical order; but none of these so struck the popular taste as *Thaddeus of Warsaw* and the *Scottish Chiefs*, the productions of her sister. These lofty romances delighted

the primitive and simple-minded public, which as yet knew nothing of *Waverley*. It is possible that with a little modernising they might still excite and charm the readers of the *Family Herald*, sated with more modern splendour and mystery. To our critical eyes now-a-days, the all-accomplished Thaddeus looks a little like a wax-work hero; but it will be hard to find in all our over-abundant romances of the nineteenth century so fine a gentleman, so disinterested a lover, an individual so certain to do what was right and best in every possible combination of circumstances. Count Thaddeus Sobieski has never any questioning with himself as modern heroes use—he never has any doubt how to act in an emergency. The splendour of his exploits and the depth of his misfortunes take away our breath. When he is introduced into London drawing-rooms as a poor teacher of languages, his conduct is as sublime in his humiliation as it was princely in his prosperity. No heart of woman could resist this union of qualities; and accordingly we find his path strewn with sighing ladies of the first fashion, to whom he behaves with an exquisite grace as well as a chivalrous honour, which secure their lifelong gratitude, even when he has to repel their advances. We have, alas! no such heroes now-a-days. The race has died out: and we fear even that a paladin so magnanimous might call forth the scoffs rather than the applause of a public accustomed to interest themselves in shabby personages of real life. But in the early days of the century the English reader was simple in his tastes, and less richly provided.

“The author to her friendly readers,” in a preface full of old-fashioned stateliness, describes the origin of her tale by giving an account of some events of her youth. The little curtain rises and displays to us an enthusiastic girl, in the days when war was echoing on all horizons, coming nearer, and affecting the imagination more closely

than has happened in our day—whose mind was fired with the same romantic pity and fervent sympathy for Poland and its heroes which thrilled the English heart when, not very long before, Campbell had made the shriek of Freedom when Kosciusko fell, ring into all the echoes. The great Polish general was in London, weak with wounds and downfall, when Robert Porter, the brother of the young writer, was taken to see him, introduced by a friend as “a boy emulous of seeing and following noble examples.” He returned full of enthusiasm to tell every particular of the interview to the eager sisters, who could not hear enough of this wonderful hero. And they themselves in their walks had seen other pathetic sufferers, old soldiers, wan and poor, who had excited their anxious and painful sympathy. “One person,” Miss Jane says, “a gaunt figure, with melancholy and bravery stamped on his emaciated features, is often present to the recollection of us all. He was clad in a threadbare blue uniform greatcoat with a black stock, a rusty old hat pulled rather over his eyes, . . . his aspect that of a perfect gentleman, and his step that of a military man. . . . We saw him constantly at one hour in the middle walk of the Mall, and always alone; never looking to the right or the left, but straight on: with an unmoving countenance and a face which told that his thoughts were those of a homeless and a hopeless man——” Between this figure which crossed the young author’s daily walks and the vision of the wounded general, and the excitement in the air, Thaddeus, the sentimental embodiment of everything that delights a girl’s fancy, took his being. It was the first beginning of the historical novel properly so called; and it is Miss Jane Porter’s boast that no less a follower than Sir Walter Scott “did me the honour to adopt the style or class of novel of which *Thaddeus of Warsaw* was the first—a

class which, uniting the personages and facts of real history or biography with a contriving and illustrating machinery of the imagination, formed a new species of writing in that day." Sir Walter is said with his usual generosity to have acknowledged this obligation—as he did also to Miss Edgeworth, by whose national pictures he professed to have been inspired. It would have been strange if the former lady at least, whose romantic gift was not made keen by any insight into character, had not taken him at his word.

The book, as something new, was published with great doubt and timidity, but was immediately successful, and went through edition after edition. Kosciusko sent the enthusiast who so celebrated his country a medal with his portrait, and a lock of his hair; and many tributes of gratitude and admiration came to her from other Polish heroes. She was made "a lady of the chapter of St. Joachim," she informs us, by her admirers in Germany, "and received the gold cross of the order from Wirtemberg." Another present less sentimental she received from America in the shape of "a handsome rosewood chair," which was sent to her as a memorial of high and respectful admiration for the author of "some of the purest and most imaginative productions in the wide range of English literature." In default of other acknowledgments, perhaps some of the writers of the present day would not object to similar testimonials from that great Transatlantic audience which British writers are expected to minister to, like Spenser's angels, "all for love and nothing for reward."

Sir Robert Ker Porter, the boy who visited Kosciusko, the brother of these ladies, an artist of creditable reputation in his day, travelled much and published various interesting accounts of his journeys; so that the whole family was known in literature. Crabbe Robinson

mentions some years after the "stately appearance and graceful manners" of the author of *Thaddeus*, whom he met at the house of Miss Benger, another writer of obscure miscellaneous literature, whose name has escaped even the dictionaries. "Few ladies," he says, "have been so gifted with personal attractions, and at the same time been so respectable as authors." Indeed the literary women of this period seem to have been specially distinguished by their good looks. Mary Wollstonecraft, Mrs. Inchbald, Mrs. Barbauld, were all beautiful women. And if Mrs. Opie's soft bloom did not reach this height, she was at least pretty and charming. Mrs. Opie came from the learned coterie at Norwich to add her gentle reputation to that of the other rising novelists. Her stories are on a gentler level, domestic, moral, and with a view to the improvement of the reader, and continue to be readable in their way, though no new departure like that of the historical novel begun, as has been narrated by Miss Porter, is to be traced to her.

These ladies, however, pale before the reputation of Mrs. Radcliffe, whose name everybody knows, but whose works, great as their power and effect was in their day, are less known now than their merit deserves. The *Mysteries of Udolpho* is old-fashioned, but it is fine reading for those who have leisure to trace the meanderings of the threads so carefully entangled, and to follow the most ethereal of heroines through the piled-up troubles which make her reward all the sweeter when it comes: and that reward always does come. In those days novelists had a different conception of their art from that which encourages them now to leave their readers with a handful of unfinished threads to be twisted up into the web of life at their individual pleasure. Mrs. Radcliffe gives us no problems to solve, no tales to complete; that is her business, not ours. She requires nothing of us but to

listen and look on, keeping all our wits about us, never knowing when a door may open which will contain the solution of the mystery, or a casket may be unlocked out of which the secret may fly. Her landscapes, even now, though literature has done a great deal since then in the pictorial art, are full of an elaborate and old-fashioned yet tender beauty. She is not familiar with them, nor playful, but always at the height of a romantic strain; not graphic, but refined and full of perception. There are scenes that remind us of the learned Poussin, and some that have a light in them not unworthy of Claude before he was put down from his throne by the braggart energy and rivalry of Turner—since when the modern spectator has scarcely had eyes for those serene horizons and gleaming moonlight seas. Perhaps of all others Mrs. Radcliffe's art is most like that of the gentle painter whom people call Italian Wilson. There is a ruined temple in the distance, a guitar laid against a broken column; but the lights, how mellow and soft, the skies how full of tempered radiance, the pastoral valleys unprofaned by ungracious foot—full of the light that never was on sea or shore! The great feudal castle which she builds in the midst of the dewy chestnut woods has never been equalled for mystery. We lose our way in its corridors, its winding stairs, the chambers high up in the turrets, where sometimes it is a bleeding retainer, and sometimes an injured wife, who is hidden away from curious eyes. Down below, in the vaulted passages underground, quarrels and passages of arms are rife, while in her spacious chamber the heroine listens and trembles—yet when the noises cease and her fluttered spirits are somewhat recovered, can always soothe herself by playing a plaintive air upon her lute, or by taking down one of the favourite volumes of her well-chosen library, in which she finds inexhaustible solace for all the evils of life.

It is not often now-a-days that we come across anything that approaches to the ethereal perfection of Emily, a being too delicate almost to have even the finest love made to her, and the very sight of whom tames the fiercest. The gloomy chieftain Montoni tries, indeed, to force her will, to make her consent to a hateful marriage, and to sign papers disposing of all her fortune; but not one of his bravoës says a word to her that is not pretty, and her "spirits" are never "fluttered" by unseemly wooings. Valancour, though he errs and goes astray, is always the most respectful of lovers; and the captive, whom she supposes to be Valancour, and who is brought out of his dungeon by her humble retainers on this mistaken idea, how devoted, how unpretending is his despairing adoration! Perhaps this is a little too fine for ordinary human nature; but it must be remembered that the school of realism and the canons of probability had nothing to do with Mrs. Radcliffe's art. The chief distinction of her power to the more commonplace reader is the skill with which she manages her mysteries—leading us from step to step through dim corridors, by uncertain lights, which have a way of going out at the most thrilling moment, across deserted chambers, where curtains rustle and sliding panels open, and the supernatural is always feared yet always averted. She was a great deal too enlightened ever to have anything to say to a ghost. In those days the ancient love of superstition had faded, and the new groping after spiritual presences had not begun. There are a hundred apparitions in her pages, but they are all elaborately accounted for, and never turn out to be anything more alarming than flesh and blood. Sometimes the effect, so carefully worked up to, is a failure, as in the case of the mystery of the veiled recess in *Udolpho*, where our imagination refuses to accept as anything but a flagrant imposition and deception the

waxen image of death which is supposed to shock every beholder out of his wits. But as a matter of fact, no mysterious terror which is not supernatural will stand investigation even by the most skilful hands. The reader is angry at being defrauded of his alarm, and knows that he has no right to be so frightened by anything that can be explained.

The character in these books, if it can be called character at all, is of a kind as old-fashioned as the costume. It is confined to the lovely creature who is the heroine, into whom the author throws herself as if the work were an autobiography. We doubt whether perhaps it is altogether well for fiction that Emily is so unlike the modern young woman who figures in the same position now. She who was too delicate to mention to her parents the declaration of love made to her, and who modestly shrinks from the certainty that she can be indeed the object of such devoted affection, can scarcely be imagined of the same species as she who describes all her lover's kisses, and glories in his fondness. But Emily, though she may be very unhappy, never makes an exhibition of herself. Concealment, like a worm in the bud, preys on her damask cheek; her smile grows more and more pensive; her gentle abstraction more deep; but she neither defies the people about her, nor cries out to heaven and earth to know why she should be so miserable. She takes a walk instead, and admires the scenery, and pens a little poem expressive of the melancholy that fills her soul; or she retires to her room and finds consolation in touching a few notes of her lute. And with a being so patient, so sweet, so humble-minded, everything of course comes right in the end. Udolpho itself cannot bring her to any evil; and her erring lover is so touched by the sight of her that he mends on the moment, without an effort, and all is well. There is a vein of sense, too,



running through the diaphanous delicacy of this fair creature. She will not sign those papers with which Montoni is always threatening, nor be led to believe that the voice on the battlements is that of an apparition. When she finally escapes at last, her ride through the woods is almost as inspiring as that of Mary Stuart in the *Abbot*, when she escapes from Lochleven. The picture altogether has a sort of personal attraction. There is no divided interest—everything centres in Emily; and Emily, even in the utmost flutter of her spirits, never disappoints her admirers. She is always immaculate, never too much disturbed to take down a favourite volume or pen the following verses, or be consoled by touching a few notes on the lute.

There is an old-fashioned book of travels by the same hand which one feels is exactly what Emily would have written had she set out travelling with Valancour a few years after their happy nuptials. It is the *Journal of a Tour through Holland and the Western Frontier of Germany*, made in the summer of 1794, and is,—besides much information, some still quite true and to the purpose, some showing how curiously everything has changed,—full of charming descriptive sketches. The author in her preface explains her “use of the plural term” by the fact that her journey was performed in the company of her “nearest relation and friend,” a periphrasis of the homely title of husband such as the nineteenth century has scarcely leisure for. Some of her ideas are quaintly insular and *rococo*, as when she tells us that travelling Englishmen “should be induced at every step to wish that there may be as little political intercourse as possible either of friendship or curiosity between the blessings of this island and the wretchedness of the Continent,” and considers that to hear “the voices of a choir on one side of the street and the noise of a billiard-table on the other”

showed "a disgusting excess of licentiousness." But if we smile at such indication of old-world sentiments, the reader will immediately find himself back again in the sweet company of the gentle Emily, when he reads such a description as the following, the only difference being that Emily would have penned at least one copy of verses, if no more, as she gazed at the wonderful scene. The travellers were hurrying home from Holland, finding the war come uncomfortably close to them ; indeed, when becalmed, and lying near the Flemish shore for about three days in that condition, they found "the firing before Sluys not only audible, but terribly loud." Here is a night and morning on the Channel, the echoes of the guns scarcely died out of their ears, but England and peace before them :—

"It was most interesting to watch the progress of evening and its effects on the waters ; streaks of light scattered among the dark western clouds after the sun had set, and gleaming in long reflection on the sea, while a gray obscurity was drawing over the east as the vapours rose gradually from the ocean. The air was breathless ; the tall sails of the vessel were without motion, and her course upon the deep scarcely perceptible, while above the planet Jupiter burned with steady dignity, and threw a tremulous line of light on the sea, whose surface flowed in smooth waveless expanse. Three other planets appeared, and countless stars spangled the dark waters. Twilight now pervaded air and ocean, but the west was still luminous where one solemn gleam of dusky red edged the horizon from under heavy vapours.

"It was now that we first discovered some symptoms of England. The lighthouse on the South Foreland appeared like a dawning star above the margin of the sea. The vessel made little progress during the night. With the earliest dawn of the morning we were on deck, with the hope of seeing the English coast ; but the mists veiled it from our view. A spectacle, however, the most grand in nature repaid us for our disappointment. The moon, bright, and nearly at her meridian, shed a strong lustre on the ocean, and gleamed between the sails upon the deck ; but the dawn beginning to glimmer, contended with the light, and soon touching the waters with a cold gray tint discovered them, spreading all

around to the vast horizon. Not a sound broke upon the silence except the lulling one occasioned by the course of the vessel through the waves, and now and then the drowsy song of the pilot as he leaned on the helm, his shadowy figure just discerned, and that of a sailor pacing near the head of the ship with crossed arms and a rolling step. The captain, wrapped in a seacoat, lay asleep on the deck, wearied with the early watch. As the dawn strengthened, it discovered white sails stealing along the distance, and the flight of some sea-fowls as they uttered their slender cry, and then, dropping upon the waves, sat floating on the surface. Meanwhile the light tints in the east began to change, and the skirts of a line of clouds below to assume a hue of tawny red, which gradually became rich orange and purple. We could then perceive a long tract of the coast of France, like a dark streak of vapour hovering in the south, and were somewhat alarmed on finding ourselves within view of the French shore, while that of England was still invisible.

"The moonlight faded fast from the waters, and soon the long traces of the sun shot their lines upwards through the clouds, and into the clear sky above, and all the sea below glowed with fiery reflections for a considerable time before his disk appeared. At length he rose from the waves, looking from under clouds of purple and gold; and as he seemed to touch the water, a distant vessel passed over his disk, like a dark speck. We rose soon after, cheered by the faintly-seen coast of England."

The woman who made a minute drawing like this of all the gradations of the sunrise, though agitated by the sight of the French coast somewhat too near, and longing to see the English more plainly, was no insignificant artist. It is not like the dashing and graphic art of to-day; its touches are like those of a miniature, lingering and tender; but the sea and sky come before us as we read with a magical, soft clearness, reality and truth.

There is very little known of Mrs. Radcliffe in actual life. Her maiden name was Ward, and her husband was the proprietor of a newspaper. She was, we are told, "distinguished for her beauty," but "studiously avoided London society, and spent her time in excursions to favourite rural resorts, and in the enjoyments of her quiet home." Certainly she never appears in any of the

gossiping chronicles of the time. The *Mysteries of Udolpho* is said to have brought her £500, and *The Italian* a still larger sum; but that is about all the record that has remained of them and of her.

In the last ten years of the century, so fruitful in original work, there existed a little group of painters who have all a certain place in the literary history of their time. The gentle Sir Joshua belongs more appropriately to a previous age, but Flaxman, Fuseli, and Blake all mingled in the society of which Godwin and his wife, Holcroft, and the other members of that bourgeois circle, were members. Of these men, all so remarkable in their way, the last named is the one whose niche in literature is the most curious. He is one of the strangest figures altogether that ever appeared in any record, and the sight of him, with his rapt and gleaming eyes, among those bustling old-fashioned streets, is like a visible appearance of the wild and ghostly among the most prosaic haunts of men. Blake was the son of a London tradesman, a respectable dissenting hosier, in the neighbourhood of Golden Square, a poor man, yet a creditable parent enough, who bound his boy apprentice at fourteen to the trade of engraving, then a most popular and flourishing profession in its heyday. It is not necessary for us to follow the elaborate story of his training, and the processes by which he attained his place in art, such as it is. He was little esteemed in his own day, though divined by a few humble friends and artful connoisseurs, and lay for many years in the depths of an almost impenetrable darkness, until in our own time the world came back to him, and rediscovered beauty and meaning in the work, which is still caviare to the general. A great deal of that work even his admirers will allow to be grotesque, and much of it is entirely unintelligible—neither, we believe, will it ever commend itself to unsophisticated

and uneducated lovers of art. What is called its unconventionality and independence of rule is in reality only a conventional merit of a higher class than that usually called by the name, an art of symbol and indication discernible by the illuminated, but impossible to the ignorant. We do not believe that the merely intelligent beholder, capable of admiring beauty and loving poetry, but without any settled creed in art or foregone conclusion, would ever of his own accord find in Blake the wonderful genius and grandeur with which it is now usual to credit him. Here and there he produces something by a sort of accidental inspiration, as in the beautiful creation, full of heavenly joy and beauty, of the "Morning stars singing together," by which the most insensible must be moved. But it is unfortunate that his exponents should strain their demands so far as to require us to applaud in an equal degree all those weird outlines flung about the windy skies, all the crouching horrors and staring wild apparitions which mope and gibber in so many of his extraordinary pages. His poems are scarcely more easy to characterise than his pictures. *The Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* were both the productions of his youth, most artless, sometimes most sweet—striking accidental melodies out of the simplest words, out of an idea half suggested, a sentiment of the ineffable sort, such as an infant, new out of the unseen, might give utterance to, could it give utterance at all. The reader is struck silent by the surprise of the little verse, a sort of babble, yet divine, which is beyond all dogmas of criticism or art, and yet touches the soul with a momentary soft contact as of angels' wings: nay, it is a silly angel, one might suppose a spoiled child of heaven, petted for its tender foolishness, as sometimes a child is on earth, but yet in its way celestial. The little snatches of verses should be sung by children in fair spring landscapes, among the

new-born lambs, or under the blossoming trees, but to criticise them as literary productions is impossible; it would be a kind of offence to simplicity and innocence. Sometimes, indeed, there strikes in suddenly a stronger note, as, when after all that ethereal babble of lambs, and flowers, and little children, the dreamer, in his bewildered Arcadia, suddenly dreams of a Tiger—and running off in his wonder into a few wild glowing stanzas, asks suddenly, *Did He who made the lamb make thee?*

This strange visionary was one of the company who met at Johnson's the publisher, in St. Paul's Churchyard, at the afternoon dinners, homely and simple, where that good man assembled the authors whom he admired, and patronised, and controlled, with something of that half worship and half contempt which is the benign bookseller's most characteristic mood. Mary Wollstonecraft, in her pensive beauty, before she had ever left England, or stepped into any of the complications of her career, was the only woman of whose presence we are informed on these occasions, and Blake was employed to illustrate some of the children's books by which she then managed to live. A story is told of his interference to save Tom Paine from the consequences of one of his political indiscretions, in which the artist seems to have shown himself the most far-sighted of the company. It was at the moment when that unattractive revolutionary had been invited to France, but, in the meantime, he had been pouring forth sedition at a public meeting, of which he gave a flaming account to the company at Johnson's table next day. They were all republicans and sympathisers with France, though varying in their inclination to commit themselves; and all with an alarmed (and, as it seems to us, exaggerated) terror of the Government, and what it was likely to do. Blake, it is said, listened to Paine's brag with a certainty that steps

would be taken at once against him. When he rose to leave, Blake laid his hand on the orator's shoulder, saying, "You must not go home, or you are a dead man!" and hurried him off on his way to France. By the time Paine was at Dover, the officers were in his house, so that the champion of the Rights of Man escaped at least a temporary eclipse, if no more (though in those days they thought of nothing less than hanging), through the means of the mild and visionary dreamer. Blake was himself a great revolutionist in his innocent way, wearing the *bonnet rouge* about the streets as no one else ventured to do.

His first publication, if publication it can be called, is a strange little romantic episode in literary history. He did not know how to bring out his *Songs of Innocence*. The painter-mind has always odd little follies peculiar to itself, and to a man so used to employ his own hands and art, it would no doubt appear more natural to produce copies of his poems by transcription than to have them printed, which he seems never to have attempted. After much consideration and prayer, and conference with the unseen, he at last decided upon this extraordinary method.

"Mrs. Blake went out with half-a-crown, all the money they had in the world, and of that laid out one shilling and tenpence on the simple materials necessary for setting in practice the new revelation. This method, to which Blake consistently adhered for multiplying his works, was quite an original one. It consisted in a species of engraving in relief—both words and designs. The verse was written and the designs and marginal embellishments outlined on the copper, with an impervious liquid—probably the ordinary stopping-out varnish of engravers. Then the white parts of lights, the remainder of the plate that is, were eaten away with aquafortis or other acid, so that the outline of letter and design was left prominent as in stereotype. From these plates he printed off in any tint—yellow, brown, blue—required to be the prevailing or ground colour in his facsimiles; red he used for the letterpress. The page was then coloured up by hand, in imitation of the original

drawing, with more or less variety of colour in the local lines. He taught Mrs. Blake to take off the impressions with care and delicacy, which such plates signally needed, and also to help in tinting from his drawings."

In this strange way was produced the series of little books, now worth almost their weight in gold to the collector, each page of which was a separate work of art. These pages are very small, worded with firm, small writing, in a framework of wild design, with little illustrations intermixed—at once an etching, a frame, and a picture. In the sweet little quaint poem, perhaps the best known of any, called *The Lamb*, we have a child caressing a lamb at a cottage door, a flock visible under the shadow of a tree, and a fanciful framework of half-developed spring branches, in a space of five inches long. Thus, every page was a picture, with its little rhyme set in the middle. Nothing could be more characteristic of the primitive artist-mind. We confess, but for the wonder and quaintness of them, that we do not always see the beauty of these strange pages—and, no doubt, if he had not preferred this fanciful primitive way, he could have got his *Songs* published easily enough. But the strange little book, bound by the wife, who was Blake's docile pupil and seconder in all things, is naturally far more precious now than any printed book; and is, in itself, a touching evidence at once of the simplicity and practical straightforward impulse of the true artist. He could do it himself: why not do it? What so appropriate, what so easy, as those tools which lay nearest to his hand?

Blake produced a great many books in the same way—for the most part merely wild ravings, of which the sober-minded reader will make neither head nor tail, allegories of earth and air, of Europe and America, with every kind of rambling mystic horror and wonder brought



in. The book of *Thol*, *The Gates of Paradise*, *Jerusalem*, and a number more—books of prophecy he called them, and they are wild as the dreams of any crazed spirit trembling on the verge of madness. It is a great question among all the critics whether Blake was mad; certainly in many of his letters there is great room for the doubt; but of one thing there can be no question, that he was an early disciple of the strange system called among us Spiritualism or Spiritism—and before mediums or *séances*, dark or light, had been thought of, believed himself to be attended by all the phenomena which of late have caused so much discussion. What were the means of communication in which he believed is not told, but it is evident that he had an entire belief in the guidance and inspiration of spiritual beings, sometimes dead members of his own family, sometimes others, as the following solemn words will prove:—

“I am not ashamed, afraid, or averse,” he says, “to tell you what you ought to be told—that I am under the direction of messengers from heaven daily and nightly. . . . I never obtrude such things on others unless questioned, and then I never disguise the truth. But if we fear to do the dictates of our angels, and tremble at the tasks set before us: if we refuse to do spiritual acts because of natural fears or natural desires—who can describe the dismal torments of such a state? I too well remember the threats I heard, ‘If you who are organised by Divine Providence for spiritual communion, refuse, and bury your talent in the earth, even if you should want natural bread—sorrow and desperation pursue you through life, and after death, shame and confusion of face to eternity. Every one in eternity will leave you, aghast at the man who was covered with glory and honour by his brethren, and betrayed their cause to their enemies.’”

These reproaches of his spiritual friends, and the struggle which he thus explains, arose in consequence of the attempt made during a three years’ residence in the country to fix Blake down to ordinary work, engraving other people’s sketches, painting portraits, and pursuing

other commonplace occupations, for daily bread. He had been introduced to Hayley, the biographer of Cowper, a kind and friendly man, if a sentimental and somewhat mawkish poetaster, with the view of illustrating that writer's works and making money for himself; and with this purpose had taken a little rustic cottage at Felpham, near his patron, with which he was delighted for a time. But when Blake found that his time was to be fully occupied with task work, and his own wild original power of production limited and discouraged, his opinion changed, and the struggle arose which he has here described. He left Felpham in three years, renouncing the attempt to make money, and recurred to his original compositions and to a very precarious and limited livelihood. "I am again emerged into the light of day," he cries after his emancipation. "I have conquered, and shall go on conquering. Nothing can withstand the fury of my course among the stars of God and in the abysses of the accuser." This is wild enough in all conscience. A little later he speaks of the composition of "a sublime allegory which is now perfectly completed into a great poem. I may praise it since I dare not attempt to be other than the secretary; the authors are in eternity. I consider it the grandest poem this world contains." Whether this was the *Jerusalem: the Emanation of the Giant Albion*, we are not exactly informed; but as it is the first "prophetic" work which follows this announcement, it is to be supposed this is what he means. Such language has been heard since from believers in the fantastic system which draws its tenets from the teachings of a piece of furniture. There is no tangible medium of communication mentioned in Blake's descriptions, but the disciples of this faith write as he did, utterances of which they do not claim to be more than the secretary, and of which they sometimes assert that they are great poems. His is

a curious antedating of a mystery which is often very vulgar, and often very foolish, but which cannot be quite accounted for either by mere imposture or credulity. There *was* no imposture in Blake, and it is strange to find in him the phraseology which was utterly strange to his time, but has come to be a comparatively well-known jargon now. The great poem is the wildest rhapsody that can be conceived. But his early songs last, and will continue to do so: even they cannot be said to be appreciated by the uninitiated. They are little known and little likely to be known: but in their ineffable artlessness they are unlike anything else of the time, or perhaps it might be safe to say, of the language, in which he remains a unique figure, unapproachable and alone.

To return more closely to the city circle, which we have, for the advantage of classification, allowed ourselves, with Southey and *Blackwood*, to call the Cockney School, we come to William Hazlitt, who has already been mentioned on various occasions, and who occupied a considerable place among his contemporaries, though none of his works were of a kind to live. He was not a poet or a philosopher, but a literary man in the closest sense of the word, impelled by circumstances and a vehement and lively intelligence to do such work as he was capable of in this fashion, rather than constrained by a higher necessity to utter what was in him for the advantage of men. It never has been proved, nor can it be proved, according to our belief, that to write for bread is bad for real genius, especially of the creative kind: but to write for bread when you have no message to deliver, no definite burden of prophecy, no story to tell, is a different matter. It is in these circumstances that literature is a dangerous profession. In most cases the professional writer has some gift besides, which buoys him up above the common merchandise of buying and selling. But Hazlitt had no

philosophy and no story; he was an essayist, a critic, a commentator upon other men's works and ways, rather than an original performer. There is nothing in literature so difficult as this branch of the profession, which tempts the unwary with its seeming ease. How far it benefits genius, to be trained and polished by all the appliances of learning, is still a moot point; but there can be no question that culture is the first essential to the literary man who does not possess genius, but only a talent for expressing himself, and the power of seeing intellectual subjects from a critical point of view. In his case the proverb does not tell, which declares that a poet must be born and not made—for he is not a poet, and his chances of commanding anything more than a present audience depend upon his thorough cultivation and knowledge. Hazlitt did not possess these qualities, and his books are already as old as if they had been written a thousand years ago, instead of half a hundred. He was, like Godwin, the son of a dissenting minister, inheriting the intellectual activities and natural political bias of the class along with its nervous sense of social slight and injustice.

“Hazlitt,” says De Quincey, always depreciatory, “smiled upon no man, nor exchanged tokens of fame with the nearest of fraternities. . . . His inveterate misanthropy was constitutional,—exasperated it certainly had been by accidents of life, by disappointments, by mortifications, by insults, and still more, by having wilfully placed himself in collision, from the first, with all the interests that were in the sunshine of this world, and with all the persons that were then powerful in England. But my impression was . . . that no change of position or of fortune could have brought Hazlitt into reconciliation with the fashion of this world, or of this England, or of this *now*. A friend of his it was, a friend wishing to love him, and admiring him almost to extravagance, who told me, in illustration of the dark sinister gloom which sat for ever on Hazlitt's countenance and gestures, that involuntarily when Hazlitt put his hand within his waistcoat (as a mere unconscious trick of habit) he himself felt a sudden recoil of fear as from one who was searching for a hidden dagger.”

Talfourd describes the gloomy essayist as "slouching in from the theatre" to Lamb's cheerful parties, "his stubborn anger for Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo" somewhat "softened by Miss Stephens' angelic notes." On this point he was at variance, not only with the authorities, but with all patriotic and enlightened opinion, and characteristically resented the disagreement in which he found himself, even with the entire band of the French sympathisers, who were otherwise his brethren, but who held Bonaparte as a sort of Antichrist.

The temper of the man, and the almost ludicrous length to which political sentiment was carried, could scarcely be better shown than in the remarks of this sharp-tongued and unwary critic upon Coleridge when floating about in the chaos of London, in the unhappy years which preceded his final settlement at Highgate. Hazlitt, the reader will remember, furnished us with one of the most delightful pictures we have of Coleridge at Nether-Stowey, and Wordsworth at Alfoxden, in those days of early inspiration, when on "Quantock's airy ridge" they planned and pondered that conquest of the world, which they indeed accomplished, but not as they thought. "What has become of that mighty heap of thought, of learning, of humanity?" Hazlitt asks, when, far from the downs and the sea, and the hopes of youth, he finds the philosophic poet amid the dreary monotones of town, "it has ended in swallowing doses of oblivion, and writing paragraphs for the newspapers." And the keen political sectary goes on to find a reason for this decadence, with the semi-fictitious passion which was characteristic of him. It is because "Liberty, the philosopher's and the poet's bride, had fallen a victim to the murderous practices of the hag legitimacy" that the mighty had thus fallen. "Proscribed by court hirelings, too romantic for the herd of vulgar politicians, our enthu-

siast stood at bay, and at last turned on the pivot of a subtle casuistry to the *unclean side*; but his discursive reason would not let him trammel himself into a poet-laureate or a stamp collector," says the envious and bitter critic. Southey, the excellent, the kind, enjoyed one of these wealthy offices; and Wordsworth, self-absorbed as one of his own mountains, maintained his independence with the aid of the other; but Coleridge, incapable of any conditions, even that of furnishing birthday odes, "sank into torpid uneasy repose, tantalised by useless resources, haunted by vain imaginings, his lips idly moving, but his heart for ever still." "Such," Hazlitt cries shrilly, "is the fate of genius in an age when, in the unequal contest with sovereign wrong, every man is ground to powder who is not either a born slave, or who does not willingly and at once offer up the yearnings of humanity and the dictates of reason as a welcome sacrifice to besotted prejudice and loathsome power!" The only comment we can offer after such a peroration is that of Mr. Burchell—"Fudge!" The author of *Fire, Famine, and Slaughter*, the most fierce and powerful of political assaults, was wont to boast that it was he who had raised the circulation of the *Morning Post*, the paper in which that wonderful eclogue appeared, from an almost nominal rate to a large and profitable sale—an assertion of course denied by the editor of the paper, who attributed the increase to other causes, but yet showing how futile was this tattle about sovereign wrong or offerings of reason and humanity to loathsome power. Such was, however, the nature of the critic and the fashion of the time.

Hazlitt, however, had the gift of a brilliant style, and a great deal of incisive and irritable force, though the saucy critic of to-day would call his writing "tall," and pull his showy sentences to pieces; and he maintained a distinct place in the literature of his time, though few

people recollect much about him now-a-days. He was a born magazine writer, with much of that sparkle and petulant force which tells at the moment, and a ready power of response to any call, a "Contributor" of a valuable kind. Such a writer, with no independent gift of production, must lay his account with oblivion. But Hazlitt in his own person must, one cannot but think, have been more impressive and interesting than in print, for, in the beginning of the two volumes which his grandson has dedicated to his memory, there are various laudatory paragraphs, testimonials, so to speak, to his merit, which rank him much more highly. "I should belie my own conscience," says Charles Lamb, "if I said less than that I think W. H. to be, in his nature<sup>1</sup> and healthy state, one of the wisest and finest spirits breathing. . . . I think I shall go to my grave without finding, or expecting to find, such another companion." Higher praise than this no man could have, and when we add his biographer's simple estimate of his titles to immortality as an "Edinburgh Reviewer, London Magazine man, a person of letters who was thought big enough game, both in London and Edinburgh, for Mr. Gifford's and Mr. Blackwood's longest shot," we feel that we have said all for Hazlitt which it is necessary to say. To have been held up to public admiration by Christopher North, as a leading member of the Cockney School, was something; and notwithstanding his real literary power, a Cockney of letters he assuredly was, subjecting all things to the standard of a narrow circle, always defiant in his own person, and in angry resistance to all the larger influences, against which his arrogant independence and self-esteem revolted.

In his personal history we find some curious circumstances. He took a step which we do not remember to have heard of as resorted to by any man of character,

before or since ; being an Englishman, with no connection whatever with Scotland, he took advantage of the Scotch law of divorce to shake himself free of a wife who did not suit him. It is true that the lady was of the same mind, and very willing to aid in the strange operation, which was carried out accordingly. His motive was to be able to marry a young woman, the daughter of the house in which he lodged, who had roused him in middle age into all the fervour of an early passion. Whether she was aware of the strong step taken by her elderly lover to open a way for her we are not told, but when he rushed back to London, a free man, to marry her, the girl put him off and played with him, and was finally discovered to be on much more affectionate terms with another lover. His fury and passion, and the letters which passed between the pair, and the terrible disappointment of his hopes, he put, red-hot with love and rage, into a book which he called the *Liber Amoris*. Such an exhibition never could be met with anything but laughter, and it has left a shade of permanent ridicule upon this fierce figure, once so active and loud, now so little known. At a later period he managed to marry another more soft-hearted woman ; but any marriage must, we should suppose, have been of doubtful legality in the circumstances. The whole story is that of one who was anything but a happy man. He began his life with a very dry and lifeless exposition of philosophy *On the Principles of Human Action* ; but all his other contributions to literature, except a *Life of Napoleon*, consisted of essays and criticism. His sketches of his contemporaries retain the interest which the work of an eye-witness always must have, but there is little that is profound or original in his criticism, much of which was spoken in the form of lectures before it found its way into print.



Of the same class, though with qualities so much more attractive that his memory is still fresh and pleasant to many readers, is Leigh Hunt, who, with the same imperfect education and want of literary training, but with a spark of genius which makes up for many deficiencies, became a member of the same lively literary circle of newspaper and magazine writers, which more or less embraced all the names that have come before us. It is a curious proof of the difference that this little spark of genius makes, to contrast the productions of these two men, both of whom have produced a mass of miscellaneous comment on every subject under heaven, hundreds and thousands of pages which served to occupy and amuse, if not to instruct, the readers of their day, just as so many of ourselves do—with an amount of workmanlike skill which earns its daily recompense very honestly so long as it has no pretension to do more, but which is altogether inadequate to build a lasting literary reputation upon. Leigh Hunt, like Hazlitt, wrote largely in newspapers, in magazines, and reviews, and collected these writings into volumes which exist and are laid up on dusty shelves where nobody thinks of disturbing them. But Leigh Hunt did what Hazlitt could not do. There came out of his heart at least two exquisite little poems, which, to apply our favourite test, would, if all he ever wrote was swept away by some conflagration, linger in individual memories for generations, and flutter down orally through the mist of years, indestructible and sacred. One of these scraps of verse is the exquisite little fable called *Abou Ben Adhem*: the other, Lines addressed “To T. L. H., six years old, during a sickness.” The former is so brief that, well known though it be, we may quote it once more as Leigh Hunt’s “title to the skies” of poetical remembrance and fame:—

“ Abou Ben Adhem—may his tribe increase—  
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,  
And saw within the moonlight in his room,  
Making it rich and like a lily in bloom,  
An angel writing in a book of gold ;  
Exceeding fear had made Ben Adhem bold,  
And to the presence in the room he said,  
‘ What writest thou ? ’ The vision raised his head  
And, with a look made of all sweet accord,  
Answered, ‘ The names of those who love the Lord.’  
‘ And is mine one ? ’ said Adhem. ‘ Nay, not so,’  
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,  
But cheerily still, and said, ‘ I pray thee, then,  
Write me as one that loves his fellowmen,’  
The angel wrote and vanished. The next night  
He came again with a great waking light,  
And showed the names whom love of God had blest,  
And, lo ! Ben Adhem’s name led all the rest.”

He who has left one such jewel as this has a claim upon his race surpassing that of the most excellent writing, the best criticism, the highest popular skill and adroitness in contemporary history. It is, indeed, the only claim that Time acknowledges short of actual creation or discovery. The clever writer who has in him, besides his writing and his cleverness, the something indefinable, unpurchasable, not to be manufactured or inherited, which can produce this little bit of verse, has a certain place secured to him for ever in the records of his language. But without this, vague miscellaneous writing, however clever, is nothing more than a profession, which earns its wages according to its quality, and has no right to expect any more.

Leigh Hunt wrote in innumerable papers ; some of these—for instance, the *Examiner*, which still exists after many changes—retain a sort of prejudice in their favour from this time, a vague idea of some literary grace and excellence superior to the ordinary, though it is long since all connection was severed between them and the original

from which this prejudice came. And his stray articles and essays would fill—do fill—more volumes than it is easy to number. He was also the victim, in a more actual sense than Holcroft, Horne Tooke, and their companions, of a political persecution. Of that “sanguinary plot against the liberties of Englishmen,” as Godwin calls it, which did these gentlemen so little harm, it is difficult to form any serious judgment now through all the heroics of the defendants, and in face of the fact that it came to nothing. Leigh Hunt’s, however, was no sedition but a libel against the Prince Regent, the “Adonis of fifty,” who had so offended the Liberal party in his time by that invariable and historical expedient of Heirs Apparent, the change of politics which follows a change of position from expectancy to power, that no mercy was shown him. Few people now-a-days will strike a blow for George the Fourth, but the man who calls the head of a State Sardanapalus, and describes him as “a violator of his word, a libertine over head and ears in disgrace, a despiser of domestic ties, the companion of gamblers and demireps,” could scarcely expect, in an age of political excitement and arbitrary proceedings, to do so without remark. The printer and writer of the article were tried for libel, and sentenced to be imprisoned for two years, and pay a fine of five hundred pounds each. Leigh Hunt informs us that it was notified to them that “if we would abstain in future from commenting upon the actions of the royal personage” both penalties might be remitted; but this neither he nor his brother chose to do—and there is no doubt that he made a great deal of literary capital out of his imprisonment. His description of it, and the means he took to make it pleasant, is very characteristic of the man, and sets at once before us the sentimentalities and prettinesses which he brought into a sort of fashion. His room in prison was “papered with a trellis of roses, the

ceiling coloured with clouds and sky, the barred windows I screened with Venetian blinds ; and when my bookcases were set up with their busts, and flowers and a pianoforte made their appearance, perhaps there was not a handsomer room on that side of the water." He was permitted to have his family with him in this Bower of Bliss, and the satisfaction of beholding the surprise and delight of every new visitor at the transformation he had effected must have gone a long way to undo the pains of the confinement. Amateurs of decorative art in the present day will shudder at Leigh Hunt's skyey ceiling and trellis of roses ; but he thought it very fine, and got true enjoyment out of his sentimental prison.

Leigh Hunt lived a long life, and wrote an interminable amount of prose, such as the world very willingly lets die. He produced a poem, the *Legend of Rimini*, a soft and novelistic version of the stern tale of *Paolo and Francesca*, in which critics were accustomed to say there are some "exquisite lines"—but the public has never cared very much for this poem. And a great deal of pretty writing came from Leigh Hunt—genial babble of green fields, pleasant enumeration of pleasant landscapes, and that kind patronage of nature which is so easy to a fluent pen, and carries with it a suggestion of delicate morality and a fine mind. At a later period he went to Italy on the invitation of Lord Byron and to join him—with the idea of setting up "a Liberal periodical publication" in conjunction with Byron and Shelley—a most curious project, which naturally came to nothing. We shall be obliged to return to this subject in our remarks upon the two great poets, at whose melancholy and prematurely ended lives we have now almost arrived.

Another most gentle and friendly figure which links itself on to this group, in the beginning of the century, by means of the Lambs, is Cary, the translator of Dante, he

who had begun his poetical career under the wing of the Swan of Lichfield, and exchanged poetical complaints in that old-world coterie. Cary was as unlike as it is possible to conceive to the half-educated and restless writers above mentioned. He was a scholar born, and a wide and unwearied reader, keeping journals which are little more from beginning to end than a list of books carefully mastered and annotated, a student whose library was his workshop, his field of action, the centre of his life. From his childhood he had exercised himself in the work of translation. "When he was only eight years old," we are informed, "I have heard him say pleasantly, laughing at his own precocious taste for translating and blank verse, that at that age he rendered a considerable portion of the first book of the *Odyssey* into his childish prose, and, having done so, cut it into lengths of ten syllables each, which he then wrote out under the persuasion that it was poetry." When he was a boy at Rugby, in a more advanced stage, he agreed with two of his friends "to attempt a metrical translation of the chief Greek poets." Thus the child was father to the man. His University career seems to have passed tranquilly without any special distinction, and he entered the Church in accordance with his father's wishes in due time, and was in 1797, when all the new poets and writers of the undeveloped age were at their fullest activity, the vicar of Abbots Bromley, newly married, and in the enjoyment of that perfect tranquillity and happiness which seem nowhere more likely to be attained than in a parsonage. Here he began, with a pleasant irregularity, by the *Purgatorio*, his great work. But it was not till 1805, when he had changed to another living, and was surrounded by children, that the first volume of the translation, beginning, as was necessary, with the *Inferno*, was published. It is amusing to find that it did not at all please Miss Seward, the "dear

mistress," whose strictures he listened to with affectionate patience, and who neither liked the original nor the translation. There is a proof of a certain superficial growth at least of culture and knowledge among us in the present day, in the frankness with which the people of that time expressed their opinions upon subjects which are now sacred from irreverent remark. Miss Seward frankly did not like Dante, and owned it. A "Muse" of society occupying her position now-a-days might be of the same mind, but would not venture to confess as much. And she found Cary's translation to be defaced by obscurity and vulgarisms of language, which she set forth in a long, very long, letter, full of verbal criticism, though without convincing the author. But either the world was of Miss Seward's opinion concerning Dante, or, as is more probable, knew nothing about that great poet, and the translation fell dead and was no more heard of. The happy chance by which it was introduced to general notice and the light of day affords one of the prettiest of literary anecdotes. Cary had suffered great domestic griefs, which shook his being to its very depths, and, in the summer of 1817, was at the seaside at Littlehampton, sadly healing from one of those great wounds, and teaching his eldest boy, by way of occupation for his languid life. It is this boy, his biographer in after years, who tells the story.

"After a morning of toil over Greek or Latin composition, it was our custom to walk on the sands and read Homer aloud, a practice adopted partly for the sake of the sea-breezes, and not a little, I believe, in order that the pupil might learn to read *ore rotundo*, having to raise his voice above the noise of the sea that was breaking at our feet. For several consecutive days Coleridge crossed us in our walk. The sound of the Greek, and especially the expressive countenance of the tutor, attracted his notice; so one day, as we met, he placed himself directly in my father's way, and thus accosted him: 'Sir, yours is a face I *should* know. I am Samuel Taylor Coleridge.' His person was not unknown to my father, who had already pointed him out to me as the great genius of our age

and country. Our volume of Homer was shut up ; but, as it was ever Coleridge's custom to speak—it could not be called talking or conversing—on the subject that first offered itself, whatever it might be, the deep mysteries of the blind bard engaged our attention during the remainder of a long walk. I was too young at the time to carry away with me any but a very vague impression of his wondrous speech. All that I remember is, that I felt as one from whose eyes the scales were just removed, who could discuss and enjoy the light, but had not strength of vision to bear its fulness. . . . The close of our walk found Coleridge at our family dinner-table. Among other topics of conversation, Dante's 'divine' poem was mentioned. Coleridge had never heard of my father's translation, but took a copy home with him that night. On the following day, when the two friends (for so they may from their first day of meeting be called) met for the purpose of taking their daily stroll, Coleridge was able to recite whole pages of the version of Dante, and though he had not the original with him, repeated passages of that also, and commented on the translation. Before leaving Littlehampton, he expressed his determination to bring the version of Dante into public notice ; and this, more than any other single person, he had the means of doing in his course of lectures delivered in London during the winter months."

It is pleasant to find that much as Coleridge was in the habit of forgetting his promises and engagements, he did not forget this. On the margin of his notes for one of his lectures stands the memorandum, "Here to speak of Mr. Cary's translation :—" and he did so speak of it that "the work, which had been published four years, but had remained in utter obscurity, was at once eagerly sought for. About a thousand copies of the first edition that remained on hand were immediately disposed of, and in less than three months a new edition was called for," while, to crown all, both the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews* re-echoed the praises that had been sounded by Coleridge, and henceforth the claims of the translator of Dante to literary distinction were universally admitted. Before this, Cary, joining in the universal verdict, had announced to his brother-in-law his meeting with Coleridge as "the most extraordinary man I ever met with."

It is pleasant, amid the accounts already quoted and those given by De Quincey and others of the chaotic character of the poet's lectures, to find so delightful an incident connected with them.

The work thus recommended to the world has kept its place ever since as the standard translation of Dante. Others may have greater literary excellence, but its faithfulness and completeness, and the, on the whole, dignified and sufficient manner in which the work is executed, give it a lasting value which no other translation has attained. Cary was guilty of many pipings of original song besides, which did not meet with such approval. We have already quoted the tender and sympathetic verses addressed to Lamb, who had found in the learned and gentle clergyman a congenial spirit. In the latter portion of his life Cary quitted the parsonage, over which the death of several children had thrown a lasting gloom, and received an appointment which exactly suited him in the British Museum. This brought him into the circle of literature in London, but not to its high places or among its fashionable votaries. He lived in Bloomsbury, as simply and as gravely as he had lived in the country; devoted to his books, and spending all his days in the great library which it was a happiness to him to watch over and care for; writing occasional magazine articles like the rest, and sending forth other essays in translation, among which was a version of the "Birds" of Aristophanes. But after ten years' enjoyment of this modest post, Cary's mind was disturbed and his position altered by the sudden elevation over him of the late well-known and celebrated Antonio Panizzi. Everybody is agreed now-a-days that a more admirable appointment than that of Panizzi could not have been made; but it is curious to see, looking back, the hard case of the good Cary, who, whatever his business qualifications may have been, was a devoted lover of books.



and the most creditable of public servants. The promotion of his subordinate, however, was more than his gentle temper could bear, and he addressed a spirited protest to the Lord Chancellor; but he had no success in his effort to undo the decision, and accordingly resigned his appointment after ten years' service. The loss, however, was not one that affected him vitally, and a few years later a pension was granted to him. He used the leisure thus forced upon him in miscellaneous literary work, and edited, among other things, a series of English poets—which, by the way, is a thing which almost every notable writer of the period seems to have done. What has become of all these series, specimens, extracts, new editions, one after the other, it is impossible to tell. But there was scarcely a bookseller or unoccupied author who did not plunge into some undertaking of the kind.

Cary died peacefully as late as 1844, in a gentle old age, consoled by the love and attention of his son. He seems to have had no special place in society, being always retiring and shy; but the Lambs, after their retirement, when Temple Lane was a thing of the past and they had gone into their suburban exile, came once a month to dine with him in Bloomsbury, a little festival which was looked forward to with pleasure on both sides. "We were talking of roast *shoulder* of mutton with onion sauce; but I scorn to prescribe to the hospitalities of mine host," is Lamb's playful suggestion in reference to one of these friendly dinners. Cary was brought in contact with other members of the craft at the "Magazine dinners," given generally by the publishers, which kept the contributors to the *London Magazine* together. At one of them a rustic author made his appearance whom we may note in passing, a gentle poet, for whom something friendly was done by the lovers of literature of the time, but who was not great, and had it not in him to

attain any height. Among the gentlemen, he was a little out of place, and did not know what to do with himself. "The most interesting of the party was the poet Clare. He was dressed in a labourer's holiday suit. The punsters evidently alarmed him, but he listened with the deepest attention to his host" (who was Cary himself, the dinner being for some forgotten reason at his house). It required something beyond the range of a rustic versifier to make out what all the wits were after—Lamb, with his rolling stammer, skilfully exercised to the advantage of his genius, and all the younger talkers used to the quick exchanges of skilful conversation.

The mention of the *London Magazine*, to which this school of writers was attached, and in which the *Essays of Elia* appeared, brings before us a brief but curious romance of literature, the tragic episode of which John Scott, the editor of that publication, was the hero. It is difficult to find any distinct record of this writer and his fate, though there are innumerable allusions to him in the literary memoirs of his day. His writings have not been collected or preserved save in the pages of his *Magazine*, but nothing can be higher than the testimony borne to his qualities by his friends and literary coadjutors. "He was," says Sergeant Talfourd, "a writer of remarkable candour, elegance, and discrimination," and his power of managing the staff of contributors, "which included so headstrong and petulant a member as Hazlitt, and one so eccentric and uncertain as De Quincey, was marvellous. Talfourd invests his unfortunate end with an almost ludicrous mystery. "In a luckless hour," he says, "instead of opposing the little personalities of Blackwood by the exhibition of a serene power, he rushed with spurious chivalry into a personal contest, caught up the weapons he had himself denounced, and sought to unmask his opponents, and draw them beyond the pale of

literary courtesy . . . and at last met his death almost by lamentable accident in the uncertain glimmer of moonlight, from the hand of one who went out resolved not to harm him." This melodramatic picture was not needed to turn into a painful horror the ridicule which had hitherto attended literary duels, such as the intended encounter, for instance, between little Moore and little Jeffrey, of which (especially as it never came to anything) it was impossible to think without a laugh. In the present case the contest of sharp words ended in real bloodshed, and the laugh is quenched in horror, mingled with a painful sense of entire incongruity. The lively dinners round the publisher's table, where Lamb punned and Hazlitt raved, and gentle Mr. Cary had his learned little joke, on one hand,—and the wilder mirth of Ambrose's parlour, where Christopher North flashed forth the light of his genius, and the Shepherd talked the divinest of nonsense, on the other,—came thus into contact for a moment with a sharp and stern touch of wrong-headed reality, incongruous human passion, out of place and out of date, half bathos, but altogether tragedy, which it is most painful to contemplate. This incident leaves a scar across the peaceful story. It is, fortunately, the only accident of this kind which we are called upon to record.

The society in London, which we have thus attempted to set before the reader, had nothing to do with the great world. If they touched occasionally upon the outskirts of that fairer sphere, their lives were entirely spent in a different atmosphere, in dingy houses and small rooms, in streets populous and noisy, or lost in the dulness of a homely suburb. The Polygon, Somers Town, the small streets about Holborn, the Temple, a more dignified title: where the air was not so heavy as it is now-a-days in the most elegant regions, and where there was little talk of fog: but where everything was Town, and the atmosphere

had all the bustle and the limitations of the streets. Little notes conveyed by hand, droppings in on this and that acquaintance, quick response of communication at all times, and a murmur of perpetual talks, rustle through this limited world. They are spectators, in minutest detail, of each other's existence, but the larger stream of life does not touch them. There is no coming and going of imperial interests, not even any greatness of passing strangers, or influences out of literature, the action, always so much needed among professional persons, of the ordinary world. This great advantage, which is shared by so many people in the higher classes, who are quite unable to profit by it, was unknown to this world underground. Hence the justice of the injurious title of the Cockney School, and hence much of the narrowness and petty personality of men whose views were large enough. The largeness of their views, passing all bounds of the practical, was indeed due to the same limitation which contracted their lives. They knew at once too little and too much for the *rôle* they assumed—too much of books and too little of men. To all fine spirits shut up in a petty world, the capabilities of nature, if once emancipated from its bounds, are far more like to become the-objects of passionate belief than is possible with those who, seeing all varieties of mankind pass before their eyes, learn the limits of hope, and get somehow to understand how little is likely to be accomplished. The little circle of *bourgeois* writers turning round and round in its own orbit, changing its combinations chiefly by means of personal quarrels and controversies, made little progress, though it believed in so much. It missed its full development because it was thus cabined and confined.

Nevertheless, there are other names which bring us westward into the more open air of the great world, where everything is more spacious, more free, more varied.

Leigh Hunt was a friend of Byron, of Shelley, and the younger group of poets. These names lead us, though ever so slightly, to the wider region, even when they themselves can scarcely be said to belong to it. Mackintosh, who had written his *Vindiciæ Gallicæ* in his young days, to change into views much more moderate as maturity and all its mixed motives came, linked them with public life and a philosophy less ideal and impossible than that of Godwin. Hazlitt lived next door to Jeremy Bentham. Thus the one sphere touched the other in which, after a different fashion, with more space and less concentration, life and thought, imagination and reason, satire and fancy, were being as fully exercised in a different way.

It is perhaps scarcely just to add to the end of this humble circle the name of a poet never attaining the first rank, yet reaching a gentle eminence on which his name, more than his work, perhaps, is still fully known—Bryan Waller Procter, more universally known in his lifetime as Barry Cornwall: but it is difficult to allot him his place elsewhere. His name involves that of Basil Montagu, whose stepdaughter he married, and to whose circle he belonged. This gentleman, the early patron and friend of many men of letters, holds a sort of middle position between the *bourgeois* circle and the finer groups of society. He was a man of fine literary taste, who loved to gather about him such members of the literary profession as came within his reach, and who, beginning with Godwin and his peers, kept up for a long time the friendly tradition, and encouraged young authors and courted old ones, as has always been the custom with those better-off people who, without the faculty or impulse of writing themselves, have yet a fondness for the society of those who exercise that craft, and love to hold on by the skirts of literature. The hospitable house of Basil

Montagu has been hardly and ungratefully used in recent days; but every such circle is liable to be so treated when it has been subject to the inspection of critical eyes, without the glamour of gratitude or kindness in them. Mæcenas becomes easily ridiculous, and no doubt there were men in Rome who thought little of that patron of the arts, considered him to be seeking but his own glory in drawing the wits about him, and called his company a menagerie, and Horace no better than a parasite. It is needless to say to the reader who it is that has done this, or to excuse the heedless words, never intended to go out of his own study, of Thomas Carlyle. The truth would seem to have lain, as usual, between the two statements: that Montagu, himself a dabbler in literature, loved its professors, yet liked at the same time to find himself at the head of a band all more or less known, about whom he was as likely to make mistakes as others of his contemporaries were, nor less or more, but for the excellence of all of whom he was ready to go to the stake—is true enough. And some were ungrateful, but some devoted to his kindly service. It was a home in which many young men were received with kindness, and notably the raw young Scotsman with Annandale strong about him, its very earth upon his shoes, who tried so hard in his early<sup>1</sup> letters to screw himself up to a pitch of seemly admiration, but in his old age had long forgotten that, and remembered only the oddities of the company, and some whiff of the lion-hunter in the heads of the house. This kind and cultivated household was in Bedford Square, half-way between the Cockney School and the ladies and gentlemen of higher social pretensions who would occasionally meet their humbler brethren in the drawing-room, which lay midway. Of all the writers who flourished there, and were applauded to the echo, Procter

<sup>1</sup> Privately printed by Mrs. Procter.

is the one most closely connected with this little centre of refinement and cultivation. He appeared in 1815 with a volume of dramatic sketches, in which he too had felt himself moved to the attempt, to "try the effect of a more natural style than that which had for a long time prevailed in our dramatic literature." His success in this was small; for among the modern writers for the stage no one as yet has found the means of adapting a poetic diction with marked success to a dramatic story. He found his way, indeed, to the stage, and had the satisfaction of seeing his works acted by such performers as Macready and Charles Kemble; but his success, so far as this goes, was one of the day, and his plays are unknown, we fear, to any theatrical repertory. He was the school-fellow of Byron at Harrow, and lived long enough to be a kind critic and counsellor far on in the century to another generation of poets. His shorter lyrics, many of them very melodious and graceful, are what has lasted longest. And he had the gentle succession, which somebody has said is peculiar to the greatest men—he handed on his little lamp of genius to his daughter, and thus prolonged a mild but beautiful fame.

WILLIAM GODWIN, born 1756; died 1836.

Published *Sketches of History in Six Sermons*, 1782.

" *Inquiry concerning Political Justice and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness*, 1793.

*Things as they are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (novel), 1794.

*The Inquirer* (series of essays), 1796.

*Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin*, 1798.

*St. Leon* (novel), 1799.

*Antonio; or, The Soldier's Revenge* (drama), 1800.

*Thoughts on Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon*, 1801.

*Life of Chaucer*, 1803.

*Fleetwood; or, The New Man of Feeling* (novel), 1804.

*Faulkner: A tragedy*, 1807.

- Published *Essay on Sepulchres ; or, A Proposal for Erecting some Memorial of the Illustrious Dead on the Spot where their Remains have been interred*, 1808.  
*Lives of Edward and John Phillips, the nephews of John Milton*, 1815.  
*Mandeville* (novel), 1817.  
*Treatise on Population*, 1820.  
*History of the Commonwealth of England*, 1824-7.  
*Cloudesley* (novel), 1830.  
*Thoughts on Man*, 1831.  
*Lives of the Necromancers*, 1834.
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MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT, born 1759 ; died 1797.

- Published *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (pamphlet), 1786.  
*Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 1791.  
*Moral and Historical View of the French Republic*, 1792.  
*Letters from Norway*, 1795.

THOMAS HOLCROFT, born 1745 ; died 1809.

- Published *Alwyn ; or, The Gentleman Comedian* (novel), 1780.  
*Duplicity* (comedy), 1781.  
*The Deserted Daughter*  
*The Road to Ruin*, 1792 } plays.  
*Anna St. Ives*, 1792.  
*Hugh Trevor*, 1794.  
*Bryan Perdue*, 1805.  
*A Tour in Germany and France*.  
*Many Translations from the French and German*.  
*Autobiography*.

Mrs. ELIZABETH INCHBALD, born 1753 ; died 1821.

- Published *Mogul Tale* (farce) ; *Such Things Are* ; *The Married Man* ; *The Wedding Day* ; *The Midnight Hour* ; *Every Man has his Fault* ; *Wives as they were, and Maids as they are* ; *Lovers' Vows* (plays), from 1784.  
*A Simple Story* (novel), 1791.  
*Nature and Art* (novel), 1796.  
 Edited by her—  
*British Theatre*, 1806.  
*Modern Theatre*, 1809.  
*Memoirs* (posthumous), 1833.



Miss ANNA MARIA PORTER, born 1780 ; died 1832.

Published *Artless Tales*, 1793-5.

Walsh Colville, 1797.

Octavia, 1798.

The Lakes of Killarney, 1804.

A Sailor's Friendship and a Soldier's Love, 1805.

The Hungarian Brothers, 1807.

Don Sebastian and the House of Braganza, 1809.

Ballad Romances and other Poems, 1811.

The Recluse of Norway, 1814.

The Feast of St. Magdalen, 1818.

The Village of Mariendorpt, 1821.

Tales of Pity for Youth.

The Knight of St. John, 1821.

Roche Blanche, 1822.

Honor O'Hara, 1826.

The Barony, 1830.

Miss JANE PORTER, born 1776 ; died 1850

Published *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, 1803.

The Scottish Chiefs, 1810.

The Pastor's Fireside, 1815.

Duke Christian of Luneburgh, 1824.

The Field of Forty Footsteps, 1828.

Sir Edward Seaward's Diary, 1831.

Mrs. RANCLIFFE, born 1764 ; died 1823.

Published *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*, 1789.

The Sicilian Romance, 1790.

The Romance of the Forest, 1791.

The Mysteries of Udolpho, 1794.

The Italian ; or, The Confessional of the Black Penitents,  
1797.

Gaston de Blondville ; or, The Court of

Henri III. resting in Ardennes

St. Alban's Abbey (metrical)

Poetical Pieces

} posthumous.

WILLIAM HAZLITT, born 1778 ; died 1830.

- Published On the Principles of Human Action, 1805.  
Eloquence of the British Senate, 1808.  
Views of the English Stage } 1817.  
The Round Table }  
The English Comic Writers, 1819.  
Characters of Shakspeare's Plays, 1817.  
The Dramatic Literature of the Time of Elizabeth, 1821  
Table Talk, 1821-2.  
The Spirit of the Age, 1825.  
Notes of a Journey through France and Italy, 1825.  
The Plain Speaker, 1826.  
Life of Napoleon, 1828-30.  
Conversations of James Northcote, Esq., 1830.
- 

Rev. H. F. CARY, born 1772 ; died 1844.

- Published Sonnets and Odes, 1788.  
Ode to Kosciusko, 1797.  
Translation of the Inferno, 1805.  
Translation of the Divina Commedia, 1814.  
Lives of the English Poets.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE COUNTRY.

It is so difficult to follow a distinct classification in respect to the literary workers who are continually crossing each other's paths, appearing and reappearing in different links and windings of the same historical way, that some arbitrary mode of division is necessary. And we think it better, having given such glimpses as we have been able of one section of the literary world in London, to pause for a little upon those who do not appear much in the centre of national life at all, before proceeding to the other greater and more showy region which touches the highest circles of the state, and belongs to what is called and has always been called "Society." The reign of the literary coteries in the provincial towns had begun to die out about the time of the new century; but yet we find many points of light all over the country, where men and women pursued their varied intellectual pursuits, with less delightful complacency indeed than that which distinguished the Swan of Lichfield, but still with a deeper sense of their own superiority and importance as enlighteners of the earth, than is general now among the unobtrusive professors of literature. So near London as Hampstead, Joanna Baillie, the most modest of women, but the most ambitious of female poets, lived for the greater part of a long life. We cannot feel that, great as her reputation was, and high as was the opinion expressed

of her by many of her most distinguished contemporaries, we should be justified in leaving out that prefix and ranking her boldly among the poets without distinction of sex. That she was superior to many men of her time is no reason for claiming for her an approach to the circle of the greatest: and to name her with Wordsworth or with Coleridge would be folly, although there is now and then a Shakspearian melody in her blank verse which pleased the general ear more than the stronger strain of the *Excursion*, and stood no unfavourable comparison with the diction of Coleridge's dramas. It is evident that she herself aimed at a reputation not inferior to theirs, and that the consciousness of a lofty purpose, and the applause of "those qualified to judge," which she received in no stinted measure, and indeed the favour of the public, which demanded several editions of the first volume of her *Plays on the Passions*, gave her a certain dignified sense of merit, such as of itself impresses the reader, and disposes him to grant the claim so gravely and modestly put forth. Personally no one could be less disposed to plume herself upon her genius, or claim the applause of society; but that she seriously believed herself to have produced great works, which the world would not let die, is we think very clear. And so thought Scott, whose opinion has so much right to be received and honoured. A woman might well think much of her work of whom he had said that "the harp" had been silent "by silver Avon's holy shore" for two hundred years until—

"——She, the bold enchantress, came  
With fearless hand and heart on flame,  
From the pale willow snatched the treasure  
And swept it with a kindred measure;  
Till Avon's Swan, while rang the grove  
With Montfort's hate and Basil's love,  
Awakening at the inspired strain,  
Dreamed their own Shakspeare lived again!"

This praise, out of all proportion to its object, and which we would not now apply to the greatest of recent poets, was given in all good faith ; and Joanna Baillie received it with a sober composure which has nothing of vanity or self-consciousness in it. There is no instance indeed in literature of a self-estimation so lofty, yet so completely modest and untinged with elation or self-applause. Her ambition reached to the very highest heights of fame, and she believed that she had attained an elevation near them. This of itself is always impressive to contemporaries, who never can be entirely certain how posterity is to receive their estimate of excellence, and who are indeed so continually proved to be wrong in it. Not only from her own generation, however, but to the present time, respect and a kindly veneration have ever attended her name. We honour her fine purpose and intention, if we forget the works in which she believed she had carried them out, and would still meet with almost indignation any attempt at unkindly criticism upon a poet so pure and high-toned, a woman so worthy of all respect. Her gentle and lovely life had no incident in it. She was one of those maiden princesses about whom there always breathes a soft and exquisite perfume, too delicate for common appreciation, of that reserved and high virginity, which, never reaching to any second chapter of life, involves an endless youth. This is not what we mean when we speak, vulgarly and meanly, of an old maid—and yet an old maid, worthy of the name, with all the strange experiences by proxy which life brings, yet with the first awe of imagination still undeparted, and the bloom never banished from her aged cheek, is one of the most delicate objects in nature. Perhaps, however, we must add, such a one is very inadequately qualified for the composition of tragedies, especially those that deal with the passions.

In the preface to her first volume, Joanna Baillie sets forth her theory of the extreme interest of "mankind to man," by way of accounting for the choice of her subjects. Her illustration of the manner in which that interest works is very bold and ingenious; we do not venture to assert that it was altogether original, but it has certainly been often repeated. Not only does she assert this to be "the proper study" of the enlightened mind, but she claims it as the origin even of those hideous curiosities, which move the multitude to the enjoyment of executions and murders, and, indeed, as in the following example, the excuse of absolute cruelty.

"Revenge, no doubt, first began among the savages of America that dreadful custom of sacrificing their prisoners of war. But the perpetration of such hideous cruelty could never have become a permanent national custom but for the universal desire in the human mind to behold man in every situation, putting forth his strength against the current of adversity, scorning all bodily anguish, or struggling with those feelings of nature which, like a beating stream, will oftentimes burst through the barriers of pride. Before they begin those terrible rites they treat their prisoners kindly; and it cannot be supposed that men, alternately enemies and friends to so many neighbouring tribes, in manners and appearance like themselves, should so strongly be actuated by a spirit of public revenge. This custom, therefore, must be considered as a grand and terrible game which every tribe plays against another; where they try, not the strength of the arm, the swiftness of the feet, nor the acuteness of the eye, but the fortitude of the soul. Considered in this light, the excess of cruelty exercised upon their miserable victim, in which every hand is described as ready to inflict its portion of pain, and every head ingenious in the contrivance of it, is no longer to be wondered at. To put into his measure of misery one agony less, would be doing a species of injustice to every hero of their own tribe who had already sustained it, and to those who might be called upon to do so—among whom each of these savage tormentors has his chance of being one, and has prepared himself for it from his childhood. Nay, it would be a species of injustice to the haughty victim himself, who would scorn to purchase his place among the heroes of his nation at an easier price than his undaunted predecessors."

By this startling yet fine example does the author declare her conviction that human character and action are of all things in the world the most interesting to men, a truth which scarcely requires so daring an illustration. It is on this ground that she chooses the action of the passions as her special theme. But the limitation of her powers, and the absence of the broader genius which can conceive life as a whole, is apparent in her parcelling out of the great motives, generally so strangely intertwined, of human action ; and a treatment so artificial deprives us of the very sympathy she claims, since, to see a man struggling, for instance, with the passion of hatred is a different thing from seeing him contend in "the grand and terrible game," as she finely calls it, where not strength of arm, nor swiftness of foot, nor keenness of eye, but the fortitude of the soul is concerned. This pedantic separation of one mental force from another turns the men of her tragedies into puppets so helpless in the grip of the formal passion, which is supposed to sway them, that we accompany their mock struggle with impatience rather than sympathy. The most popular of the tragedies, and the one which the author had the gratification of seeing performed by no less actors than John Kemble and Mrs. Siddons, the play of *De Montfort*, affords us at once an instance of this. It is, perhaps, the best of Joanna Baillie's tragedies ; but there is no trace in it of "the grand and terrible game." From the moment when the hero presents himself to us he is not struggling against his master-passion, but nursing it in long soliloquies and musings, and seizing every opportunity to secure its ascendancy over him. None of that wonderful play of suggestion with which Shakspeare leads us to the inevitable end is possible in so straightforward an exhibition. Nor is there any cause given, anything to justify the victim of passion or to call forth our sympathy. His enemy has

done him 'no harm, his hatred is entirely without reason, his wrath wordy and weak. Artifices of the simplest description suffice to drive him to madness, his revenge is cowardly, and his remorse womanish. He is introduced in gloomy self-absorption, impatient alike of kindness and service, brooding over his passion. "I loathed thee when a boy" is all the excuse he attempts to make for himself: and it is not only when his enemy crosses his path that the ecstasy of rage is on him. It possesses him continually as love does, but with even more constant force. It has

"Driven me forth from kindred peace,  
From social pleasure, from my native home,  
'To be a sullen wanderer upon earth,  
Avoiding all men, cursing and accursed."

The forced character of the hero's attitude is all the more evident from the fact that the object of this concentrated wrath has no special connection with the hater, and does not force himself upon him in any way, the only direct act of intercourse between them, of which we are informed, being that Rezenvelt has spared the life of De Monfort in an encounter of arms when he was at his enemy's mercy. Nor does Rezenvelt's demeanour, when he is introduced, revolt us as it ought to do, to keep us in sympathy with Monfort, for his light-heartedness is of an innocent kind, and his wit not pungent enough to hurt a fly. Jane, the sister of De Monfort, is a noble description, but she is not much more. The following passage, which is the preface to her appearance, has been often quoted; but it is almost the only one we care to give, not only as an example of Joanna Baillie's power, but also of her weakness:—

*Page.* Madam, there is a lady in your hall,  
Who begs to be admitted to your presence  
*Lady.* Is it not one of our invited friends?



*Page.* No, far unlike to them ; it is a stranger.

*Lady.* How looks her countenance ?

*Page.* So queenly, so commanding, and so noble,  
I shrunk at first in awe ; but when she smil'd,  
For so she did to see me thus abash'd,  
Methought I could have compass'd sea and land  
To do her bidding.

*Lady.* Is she young or old ?

*Page.* Neither, if right I guess ; but she is fair :  
For time hath laid his hand so gently on her,  
As he too had been aw'd.

*Lady.* The foolish stripling !  
She hath bewitch'd thee. Is she large in stature ?

*Page.* So stately and so graceful is her form,  
I thought at first her stature was gigantic ;  
But on a near approach I found, in truth,  
She scarcely does surpass the middle size.

*Lady.* What is her garb ?

*Page.* I cannot well describe the fashion of it.  
She is not deck'd in any gallant trim,  
But seems to me clad in the usual weeds  
Of high habitual state ; for as she moves  
Wide flows her robe in many a waving fold,  
As I have seen unfurled banners play  
With a soft breeze.

*Lady.* Thine eyes deceive thee, boy ;  
It is an apparition thou hast seen.

*Freberg (starting from his seat).* It is an apparition he has seen,  
Or it is Jane De Monfort.

This is said to be a wonderfully good description of Mrs. Siddons, and to see that great actress enter immediately after must have had a wonderful effect upon the audience ; but once on the stage, except to receive the tedious and lengthened confidences of her brother, there is little or nothing for Jane de Monfort to do, and though everybody else continues to admire and praise her, she has no influence on the course of events, and is, in short, a mere dignified spectator from beginning to end. It is unnecessary to point out the prosaic line here and there in the poetry itself, which mars the effect even as a

description. Besides the absence of any possible sympathy with the hero, the play is without incident or movement. Hatred holds the stage alone, unreasoning and extreme. The play of human life is all suspended, and the central figure has room for no sentiment, no idea, but one. In *Basil* the construction of the play is better, for it is not so entirely monotonous. Besides the love of the hero, there is the desire to conquer on the part of the heroine, mingled with a wavering beginning of affection: and the double intrigue of the Duke and his counsellors to detain the unlucky general and excite against him his mutinous soldiers, relieves the pressure of the one sole passion. It is unnecessary to enter into the whole series in detail. They are all marked with the same faults, and in none is the workmanship so fine as to dazzle the reader. Potent and great poetry will triumph over any fault of construction, but it is marvellous to contemplate the acres of respectable verse, in which an unnatural and formal pose of the soul can be kept up, scene after scene and act after act, with rarely a gleam of nature shining through. The tragedy of *Ethwald* is a double one, two long plays to exemplify the well-worn dangers of ambition, which are only not so trite as they are bloody. But all these tragedies, without exception, are bloody. When there is not a hecatomb of slaughtered victims, the one invariable "corse" is pierced with a dozen wounds at least.

All this is in very strange contrast with the character and position of a woman so womanly and genuine: but stranger still is her sober certainty of the dignity and importance of her work. This conviction shone through every line of her elaborate prefaces, and enshrined her name and her dwelling in the quiet modesty of private life. For many years her house at Hampstead was an object of pilgrimage to many, and the best of the age

resorted to it with a respect which was almost allegiance. Not that she they sought had any wealth of instruction or witchery of words to charm them withal, such as were possessed by the greater poet so near her on the other suburban hill at Highgate. It would be hard, indeed, to say what was and has been since the secret of Joanna Baillic's power; perhaps it was at bottom that profound and most modest, yet unwavering faith in herself, which is visible in all she says. A conviction so serious and so entirely unmingled with vanity, is very impressive, and her generation would seem, respectfully and devoutly, though not without here and there an occasional scepticism, to have taken her at her word. Jeffrey, in his early boldness, in one of the first numbers of the *Edinburgh*, assailed her in his usual frank manner, being no respecter of persons. Some years after, when she and her sister were in Edinburgh, the dauntless critic, who evidently had so little malice in his assaults that he never considered them a reason for keeping aloof from the victims, sought her acquaintance; but, as her biographer says, "Joanna was inexorable." She would have nothing to say, in his own empire and capital, to the Rover-chief, the Arch-critic, as his townsfolk called him. No other author we know of was so stern or determined. Southey sneered in his sleeve, but did not refuse to meet his literary enemy—but Joanna was inexorable. At a later period, however, the poet forgave—and little Lord Jeffrey, in his visits to London, found his way as often as another to Hampstead, where Scott hastened whenever he had a chance, and many a visitor besides, whose visits were well worth remembering. Joanna was not eloquent in talk, nor in any way remarkable to a stranger: her sister Agnes, who was her constant companion, was the first of the two in society: but Sir Walter Scott declared that if he wanted to give an intelligent stranger the best idea

possible of an English (he should have said Scots) gentlewoman, he would send him to Joanna Baillie, and it would be hard to find higher praise.

Her first publication was a little volume of *Fugitive Verses*, and this, a reprint of the juvenile collection, was also her last. She dedicated the last edition to Samuel Rogers, who had advised its republication, "a poet," she says, "who, from his own refined genius, classical elegance, and high estimation with the public, is well qualified to judge," and to whom she was indebted for "very great and useful service" in criticism. But at the same time, with a half pathetic apology, through which there tingles an ironical note, Joanna explains that "Modern Poetry, within these last thirty years, has become so imaginative, impassioned, and sentimental, that more homely subjects in simple diction are held in comparatively small estimation." This was long after Wordsworth's defiance of fine words and high poetic language had resounded to all the winds; but contemporaries are oblivious of each other. And Joanna still stood upon the pre-Wordsworth ground, at a time when Byron and Shelley were raising new standards of poetic advancement. "When these poems were written," she adds, "of all our eminent poets of modern times not one was known. Mr. Hayley and Miss Seward, and a few other cultivated poetical writers, were the poets spoken of in literary circles. Burns, read and appreciated as he deserved by his own countrymen, was known to few readers south of the Tweed." What a revolution to have occurred in one woman's life! Joanna Baillie died in the serenest and most beautiful age so short a time ago as 1851, after a long, gentle, and tranquil life.

It might, perhaps, have been better to place the name of Mrs. Barbauld in our last chapter among the *bourgeois* circle already referred to; for she is frequently spoken of

among them, sometimes with friendly comment, sometimes with the natural asperity which a critic must expect to meet with: for she was a frequent contributor to the periodicals of the time, and a reviewer, the most ungracious of all offices. No such weight of reputation as that which Joanna Baillie has retained—through an almost complete ignorance on the part of the present generation of her works—has ever, so far as we can make out, belonged to Mrs. Barbauld: yet it is difficult to tell why, for she has left behind her at least one scrap of verse which is immortal, and much beside that is well worthy a place in the recollection of her country. She was, like so many of the writers we have had occasion to refer to, the child of a dissenting minister. The position seems to have been exceptionally favourable to literature. In the case of Mrs. Barbauld, a whole succession of dissenting ministers are involved, dating on one side from one of the Seceders of 1662, “the noble 2000,” as Miss Aikin describes them, “who resigned their livings rather than violate conscience at the prompting of that treacherous bigot, Lord Clarendon.” She was born in 1757, Anna Letitia Aikin, and her father’s life was chiefly spent at the head of a theological academy for dissenting students, established at Warrington. Of the professors there, the famous Dr. Priestley was one, and Gilbert Wakefield, afterwards convicted after the pleasant fashion of the time for sedition, in consequence of a political pamphlet, another; so that it is evident the little community was of advanced views. Dr. Aikin was the theological tutor of his academy. He held some “obscure notions,” according to Priestley, upon the doctrine of the Atonement, but was an Arian like the rest. The Nonconformity of the time, at least in its most cultivated and intellectual circles, was everywhere strongly inclined to Unitarianism. They made a lively little community of their own, the

distinct colour of the Nonconformist party of which it consisted giving an amusing and characteristic variety to the type. The Professor's daughter was a beautiful and sprightly girl, of a fine spirit, and full of activity and life. There is a story of her sudden escape, by climbing a tree, from the anxious suit of a rustic lover. The tree grew against the garden wall, and the alarmed young lady swung herself over into the lane beyond, leaving her suitor *planté là*. "He lived and died a bachelor," adds the record: "and though he was never known to purchase any other book whatever, the works of Mrs. Barbauld, splendidly bound, adorned his parlour to the end of his days." It might have been well for the girl if she had been content with this faithful farmer, and not gone farther and fared worse.

The man she married was a young Frenchman of a Huguenot family, whom his father, who had a post in the household of the Electors of Hesse, "destined for the English Church," we are told, though, by a somewhat ludicrous mistake, he sent his son, in preparation for the Anglican Establishment, to the Warrington Theological Academy, to the hands of the Priestleys and Wakefields. By this time Miss Aikin had already published a volume of poems, of which Dr. Priestley writes, with somewhat ponderous flattery, that one of his friends has read them not only "with admiration, but astonishment," and requests from her a poem to be published for the benefit of Paoli and the brave Corsicans, which, he says, "may be the *coup de grâce* to the French troops in that island." This first essay in literature also procured for the young author a solemn letter from the great Mrs. Montagu, once the arbiter of fame, expressing the great pleasure she feels in "opening a more intimate correspondence with Miss Aikin." "You are certainly obliged," says the Queen of Society to the novice whom she compliments, "to every

man who is not jealous, and to every woman who is not envious of your talents." The young lady thus distinguished was possessed of great beauty. "Her form was slender, her complexion exquisitely fair, with the bloom of perfect health; her features regular and elegant, and her dark blue eyes beamed with the light of wit and fancy." Perhaps amid all the professors who "drank tea together every Saturday," and whose "conversation was equally instructive and pleasing," the gay young Frenchman, Rochemont Barbauld, though he was somewhat flighty, and his "theatrical French manners" alarmed the Lancashire society, was a welcome relief. "Neither Oxford nor Cambridge could boast of brighter names in literature and science than several of those dissenting tutors," says Mrs. Barbauld's niece and biographer, Lucy Aikin, herself not without pretensions to fame. But even dons of the first water are found to go to the wall in honour of a foolish undergraduate, and the girl-poet was no wiser than her kind. When she was warned that her lover had a predisposition to insanity, she answered bravely, "If I were now to disappoint him he would certainly go mad"—and held to her choice. The newly-married pair went to live in the village of Palgrave, in Suffolk, where the husband became the minister of the little Salem of the place, and, in addition, set up a school. The success of the school was great, and Mrs. Barbauld "threw herself heart and soul into the work." She had to contend with her husband's occasional "fits of insane fury," and to keep the routine of the place undisturbed by this terrible risk. Studious little boys of cultivated families, such a person as William Taylor of Norwich, and that great Dr. Sayers whose claims to renown have so entirely died out of recollection, were among the pupils whom she introduced to the early ways of learning: and for them and her nephew and adopted child, Charles

Aikin, she wrote the delightful *Early Lessons*, which is the most poetical and idyllic of all baby books. Never were words of one syllable so charmingly employed. The *Hymns in Prose*, perhaps as having a somewhat higher aim, have held their place longer. But hymns in prose are a mistake, and never will be so popular as verse with children; whereas the lovely little pictures of the *Early Lessons* are never out of date. They are, among the dull pages of ordinary lesson books, like vignettes by Stothard among the common illustrations of a penny journal.

The Barbaulds went often to London in their holidays and saw congenial people, and got free of the toils of their life; and after about ten years of school work they left their country academy and settled in Hampstead for some time. Here Mrs. Barbauld made the discovery that *De Monfort*, a tragedy which it had given her great pleasure to see, and which had been recently published in a volume called *Plays on the Passions*, was written by "a young lady of Hampstead whom I visited, and who came to Mr. Barbauld's chapel, all the while with as innocent a face as if she had never written a line." It was no small glory, it may be well supposed, for that young lady (not quite so young perhaps as friendship describes her) to have her fine verses mouthed by Mrs. Siddons and Kemble. Mrs. Barbauld has never had any such rank as the visionary unjustifiable rank of the modest and gentle Joanna. She was but a writer of little poems, of children's lesson-books, of reviews, and magazine articles, beside the lofty pretensions of the dramatist. Yet she had always warm admirers. Hannah More writes to her about her "incomparable poem" addressed to Mr. Wilberforce, on an incident in the agitation for the abolition of slavery. Young Mr. Crabb Robinson being asked by a young lady if he would like to know Mrs. Barbauld, answered with enthusiasm, "You might as well ask me if I would like



to know the angel Gabriel,"—and such authorities as Dr. Johnson and Charles James Fox regretted the waste of her great talents in the composition of children's books. On the other hand, Lamb, whom she reviewed with considerable severity, launched keen little stammering gibes at her, and spoke of her and Mrs. Inchbald as the Bald women.

It was while she was living in Hampstead that her brother, Dr. Aikin, between whom and herself the warmest affection always existed, produced the *Evenings at Home*, which for a long time was one of the most popular of instructive books, read aloud on winter evenings in thousands of families, and forming the minds of many gentle unlearned people. In this book Mrs. Barbauld had some share. And it was about this time (in 1793 or '94) that she was in Edinburgh, and gave, as Sir Walter has said, the first distinct touch to his dormant genius by making known the translation of "Lenore," made by her old pupil and young friend William Taylor, whose sobriquet "of Norwich" is somewhat tedious, but reads like a title. All this time she was living a life of the keenest agitation and distress, watching over her unfortunate husband, whose mad paroxysms got more and more alarming, but from whom she would not be separated as long as it was possible to keep him at home. In the beginning of the new century they removed to Stoke Newington, where her brother had gone to live, and bought a house close to Dr. Aikin's, whose presence was a support to the unhappy wife in her terrible watch and charge. Here she lived, sometimes in danger of her life, screening and shielding her unfortunate husband at once from public knowledge of his state, and from the horrors of restraint. It was here that Crabb Robinson saw her and put down his impressions with his usual graphic neatness of touch. "Mrs. Barbauld bore the remains of great personal beauty,"

he says. "She had a brilliant complexion, light hair, blue eyes, a small elegant figure, and her manners were very agreeable, with something of the generation then departing." A short time after her husband's malady broke out into wild madness: he pursued her with a knife to kill her, and she was compelled to take refuge in her brother's house. After this, the devoted woman was compelled to yield, and he was put under restraint; but shortly after released himself and her by suicide. She lived more than a dozen years after this, dying a very old woman, over eighty. Among her productions were some political essays, as well as many on literary subjects, all lost in the indiscriminate mass of anonymous periodical writing, to which most known authors have contributed more or less. Her poem on the year 1811, written at a melancholy moment of the national history, and when she herself had little cheerfulness to spare, contains the original of that famous New Zealander of Lord Macaulay's, with whom we are now all so familiar. It was an "ingenuous youth" from "the Blue Mountains, or Ontario's Lake," whom she imagined, coming on pilgrimage to see "London's faded glories."

"Pensive and thoughtful shall the wanderers greet  
Each splendid square and still, untrodden street;  
Or of some crumbling turret mined by time,  
The broken stairs with perilous steps shall climb; .  
Then stretch their view the wide horizon round,  
By scattered hamlets trace its ancient bound,  
And choked no more with fleets, fair Thames's sway  
Through reeds and sedge pursue his idle way."

This, in those days when prosecutions for sedition were easy, was considered unpatriotic. "There was a disheartening and even gloomy tone" in it, which "I," says Crabb Robinson, "even with all my love for her, could not quite excuse." It was met by a "coarse review in

the *Quarterly*," which gave Mrs. Barbauld great pain, and of which Miss Edgeworth wrote to her in warm indignation, but droll phraseology, condemning "the odious tone in which they dare to speak of the most respectable and elegant female writer of whom England can boast." Mrs. Barbauld, however, was more than respectable and elegant. She is one of the most attractive figures of her age. Her little *Lessons* will commend themselves to everybody who loves childhood—and she is one of the writers, who, apart from all other claims upon our recollection, has won a tender immortality by one stanza of exquisite and genuine feeling such as finds an echo in most human breasts. It is best that the reader who probably knows this should have it in the setting given it by Crabb Robinson, and hear what great voice it was that confirmed its title to the skies.

"It was after her death that Lucy Aikin published Mrs. Barbauld's collected works, of which I gave a copy to Miss Wordsworth. Among the poems is a stanza to Life, written in extreme old age. It was long after I gave these works to Miss Wordsworth that her brother said, 'Repeat me that stanza by Mrs. Barbauld.' I did so. He made me repeat it again. And so he learnt it by heart. He was at the time walking in his sitting-room at Rydal, with his hands behind him; and I heard him mutter to himself, 'I am not in the habit of grudging people their good things, but I wish I had written those lines—

'Life! we've been long together,  
Through pleasant and through cloudy weather;  
'Tis hard to part when friends are dear,  
Perhaps 'twill cost a sigh, a tear,  
Then steal away, give little warning,  
Choose thine own time;  
Say not good night, but in some happier clime  
Bid me good morning.'"—

Mrs. Barbauld's family was full of literature—but as so often happens when one of an attached kindred attains eminence, the work of the rest is of a nature to encourage

the suspicion that it never would have come into being but for the existence of one person of genius among a number of intelligent followers. Miss Lucy Aikin, her niece, wrote her biography, with an old-fashioned formality which must have been antiquated in her own day, but which now is pleasant like Chippendale furniture and blue china—and was besides the author of various historical compilations. This lady's brothers produced some scientific work, carrying out, as the family biographer says, the family vocation. Thus, as in so many cases, the clear little stream of genius dwindled and lost itself among the sands.

Of the same class of cultivated and intellectual minds, stamped with the peculiar individuality given by the air of the provinces and the atmosphere of Dissent, was William Roscoe, one of the earliest of those commercial magnates whose taste and love of art have given them a distinct place in the world of literature. It is a combination which always has been popular. Great wealth makes great expenditure not only lawful but laudable—and for a man without estates to keep up, or natural dependants to provide for, there is something very seductive in the power of accumulating beautiful things about him, and making the symbols of his money more splendid and graceful than even the stately houses and historical surroundings of the longer-established aristocracy. The inclination which turns the mind of such a man to the glories of the Renaissance, and the citizen-princes who cultivated the genius and enjoyed the luxuries of that impure and cruel, but glorious and gifted age—is a very natural one: and nowhere better could the biographer of Lorenzo the Magnificent be found than in a merchant of Liverpool, then rising into wealth and importance such as all the wealth of the Italian cities could vainly have attempted to rival, yet entirely destitute of that kind of

endowment which has made them immortal. The Roscoes—for this refined and intellectual citizen was the father of a family of sons, all intellectual and highly cultivated as became their parentage, and all authors—which perhaps was more than was necessary—were the centre of a lively and clever society in Liverpool, better known than they probably would have been had they been in London itself, and coming into contact as the notabilities of their town with everybody notable that passed that way. We have almost forgotten now-a-days how excellent a point of vantage this local reputation is, and how much it enhances the reputation of a writer, who, under the present laws, would probably be swallowed up amid the literary circles of London, and fail altogether for want of the pedestal which a big admiring provincial town could give him. Roscoe was a pupil of Mrs. Barbauld in his early years, like the often-quoted William Taylor of Norwich. Both of these men kept a certain nucleus of literary life in their different regions, and derived a sense of greatness and superiority from their position, the pomp of which is sometimes amusing: but no doubt it was a good thing that they were there, leavening the rude energy of a great mercantile community on one hand, and quickening the dulness of provincial life on the other. They were all Dissenters—the Roscoes, the Aikins, the Taylors, and many more—inclining towards Unitarianism, if not going farther in the way of “free thought,”—all come of respectable well-to-do families, known to their fellow-townsmen, and thus as good as a certificate in favour of literature, showing that it was not a vagabond profession, as so many good people thought.

Of a very different class, though still Dissenters, and still provincial, were the great preacher Robert Hall, and the severe essayist John Foster. The former we must leave for another chapter. But Foster is a distinct variety

among the professors of literature. He is the impersonation of a somewhat gloomy Dissenter, shut up by circumstances in a small circle, sitting among his little group of intellectual persons with a heartfelt sense of aggrieved superiority, and contemplating most things in heaven and earth as subjects to be discussed by letter or by word of mouth. His essays had, at one time, a wide reputation, and they have always been of the kind of literature appreciated by persons of thoughtful minds without much education, to whom the gravity of steady intellectual investigations, not of too scientific an order, is new and delightful. An essay *On Decision of Character* does not seem likely to be very original, but yet there is the originality of a mind not too much cultivated or too much pervaded by other men's thinkings in the conscientious examination of his subject, which Foster gives. He speaks, in one of his letters, of "my total want of all knowledge of intellectual philosophy and of all metaphysical reading," which is not a promising beginning for a thinker; but he adds—a consideration which atones for his ignorance—that "whatever of this kind appears . . . is from my own observation and reflection much more than from any other resource." This, though sadly unsatisfactory to the student, is precisely the kind of semi-philosophical thinking which pleases those "thoughtful" readers who are, if we may use the expression, of the middle class in mind as usually in circumstances; and who feel themselves superior to the easy level of mere light literature without being sufficiently educated or capable of severe mental exertion to appreciate scientific philosophy.

In the many excellent households ambitious of both the reputation and the reality of thoughtfulness, and loving to believe that theirs was no flippant talk about objects of no particular interest, but lofty conversation,

in which no wandering Raphael—did such a visitant ever appear unawares—need have felt himself out of place, Foster was a congenial teacher. Every idea that presented itself to his mind did so as an object for exposition or discussion. There is a curious confession of weakness made by him in his old age, which shows how entirely this had been the habit of his life. He describes himself as unable any longer to “*work a conversation*,” and therefore avoiding visitors. “In my present state of debility,” he says (in a letter concerning the arrival of a colleague), “I feel an absolute horror of the necessity of long laborious *talks*, such as would be inevitable to a constant association with a man like him, a thorough college man, hard disciplined, doggedly literary and nearly a stranger. With *you* the case is quite different—we are old acquaintances; there is no obligation of ceremony; we can talk about what we like; read Walter Scott; be under no necessity of mental exertion, but just as far as we find it agreeable . . . anything more formal, more laborious, and more continued than this, miserably jades me. *It would be as bad as having to preach every day.*”

This alarmed avoidance of the kind of conversation which was too familiar to him, gives a sort of whimsical picture of what he had been. His essays, and even his familiar letters, all convey the same impression. One can imagine the little narrow circle sitting round, all with ears on the alert for every new opening for thought, “working the conversation” with conscientious zeal, losing no opportunity of self-improvement. An essay-writer is always more or less exposed to the suspicion of writing for writing’s sake, whether he has or has not anything to say; and Foster had none of the qualifications of fine and flowing style, of gracious and graceful imagination, which sometimes make the mere charm of the execution a very sufficient reason for literary work. He besieged

his subject with all the science he knew, and the most conscientious intention, as he drove it from line to line of its fortifications, of doing real service to humanity by forcing it to disclose itself; and the process was eminently satisfactory to a large audience of the like-minded, fond of thought that could be thus followed, that was not too deep for them, and that looked so much more profound than it was. "I like my mind," he says, "for its *necessity* of seeking the abstraction of every subject; but, at the same time, this is, without more knowledge and discipline, extremely inconvenient, and sometimes the work is done very awkwardly or erroneously. How little the reader can do justice to the labours of an author unless himself also were an author!" Bacon himself had no such elevated idea of the difficulties of his work.

We require to call up before us the dissenting community of the period, with its strong underlying sense, not only that it was the salt of the earth, but that its bounden duty was to prove itself so, amid the levities and flippancies of ordinary society, even in its domestic privacy—by "working the conversation," and keeping up a pervasive intellectualism as well as piety—in order to understand such men and their productions. For one of the strangest things in the revelation, when such a man as Foster rises high enough to be visible against the firmament, is the sudden surging out of chaos along with him, hanging to his skirts, of numbers of nameless persons, each with a little glimmer of reputation of his own, author of a book, an essay, at the least a volume of sermons, which makes him think himself, and induces his friends to believe that he is, a member of the literary republic. These swarm about Foster, Reverends this and that, men whom he considers of genius, born lights of the dim provincial sphere. And it is very surprising to see how intellectual those excellent people were, how literature



ran in families, and how scarcely a chapel existed in all the towns and villages of the Midland Counties without some little light of the kind, some maker of gentle verse, or writer of moral essays, on *Maternal Solitude*, on *Rival Pleasures*, a thousand little subjects on which well-turned formal sentences could be put together, and well-worn but modest and virtuous thoughts be expressed. The reader may be permitted to wonder whether anything of the same high, if narrow level, remains now-a-days in the simple homes where poor Independent ministers vegetate, sadly subject, as we have learnt to think them, to vulgar deacons and green-grocers—where there is one small maid-of-all-work for all attendance, but the highest subjects are discussed in the little parlour, and father and mother alike, or at least, one of the young ladies, retire from time to time to compile the careful manuscript. Such a household at Lewisham in Suffolk, and afterwards at Ongar, was the family of the Taylors, the father of which was an engraver as well as a pastor, the mother the author of one or two moral tales, the daughters Jane and Ann writers of a little more note, and the son the well-known Isaac Taylor, the author of many philosophical works in the same vein as those of Foster, though much more voluminous and wordy. His *History of Enthusiasm* is one of the best known and most popular of many works, and may be considered in some sense the parent of a great deal of recent literature, in which a gentle egotism and an inclination to mix up the mild records of personal experience with more legitimate commentaries upon books and life, and keep a virtuous and amiable “I” always in the front, whatever may be the subject treated—have originated a popular literary method. This domestic eloquence and tea-table sublimity bring the art of “thoughtful writing” down to the capacity of the simplest audience, and make the reader proud of himself

as well as delighted with his intellectual guide. But the sisters belong entirely to the gentle refinement of that obscure world above which Isaac Taylor hovers in the more ambitious position of a great writer and thinker. They both wrote verses, *Original Poems for Infant Minds*, and several other collections, in one of which occur the little verses which are in their way immortal, though the reader will smile at the description—the “Twinkle, twinkle, little star,” which we have all learned in our day and taught to our children. Jane Taylor was the more gifted of the two sisters, and there are some of her prose sketches which are worth remembering. “How it strikes a Stranger,” a little epilogue in which the supposed impression made upon the mind of an angel whose curiosity has tempted him, even at the cost of sharing their mortality, to descend among men, is the theme, recurs to our mind from the recollections of youth with considerable force.

A writer of more note and power, connected with a similiar community though scarcely proceeding from the same caste of prophets, was James Montgomery, who, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was the editor of the *Sheffield Iris*, and already known as a poet of the highest moral tone. He was the son of a Moravian missionary, but had broken forth from that quaint society in the energy of his youth, though he returned to his allegiance in after days. Though it is difficult to think of him now but as the gentlest and mildest of religious poets, he was one of those who came in contact with the capricious and irritable power of the State in the agitating years of the French Revolution. A poem which he printed on the demolition of the Bastille, though not written by himself, was interpreted to be a seditious libel, and he was fined and imprisoned for it. A similar offence brought him again into York Castle some time later; but such

accidents brought distinction rather than disgrace in those troubled times. He published various long poems which have faded from recollection—"The World before the Flood," "The Pelican Island," and many others; but it is by the occasional verses still to be found in collections of pious poems, and in some cases, we think, even used as hymns, which keep him in remembrance—such poems as that on "Prayer," which express the pseudo-thought and real devotion of the vast underground audience (if we may so call it) to whom poetry is only poetry when it puts into words something they want and understand—or veils their want of understanding for them with melodious words, which perhaps is still better. These verses give us no additional insight into the character of prayer. To have it described as

"The motion of a hidden fire  
That trembles in the breast,"

the "burden of a sigh, the falling of a tear," does not, we are obliged to say, convey any clearer conception. But the way of saying it has proved delightful to many a gentle reader, very well and devoutly conscious of that profound operation of the soul, though no more able to explain it than the poet. The religious poetry which pleases the multitude—and nothing does so please the multitude as religious poetry—is all more or less of this class.

To turn from those pious circles so full of all the paraphernalia of thinking, its symbols and surroundings, to a life so full of the excess of practical energy as that of William Cobbett, is a leap indeed. Nothing could be more unlike the calm and regulated existence, with more books and ideas than life and action in it, of the ministers' houses, than the story of the restless and eager peasant lad, who "did not remember the time when I did not

earn my own living," and who stormed through every phase of life with an energy and self-will, and independent pride in his own exertions, which is amusingly tempered by much mental adroitness and a great deal of the moral confusion of a mind intensely bent upon its own advancement. His account of his early days reminds us, in a small degree, of the more tender picture left us by Burns and his brother Gilbert, of the corresponding cottage in Ayrshire, where, at about the same period, these Scotch ploughboys were being trained by the patriarch father whose noble and serious character gave dignity to his race. The breeding of the two families seems to have been somewhat similar. "We were all of us strong and laborious; and my father used to boast that he had four boys, the eldest of whom was but fifteen, who did as much work as any three men in the parish of Farnham." And though Cobbett seems to have made his first step in the thorny ways of letters in a dame's school, it was this father who, "in the winter evenings, learnt us all to read and write, and gave us a pretty tolerable knowledge of arithmetic. Grammar he did not properly understand himself, and, therefore, his endeavour to teach us that necessarily failed." One wonders if there are many hardworking labourers or even small farmers in these regions now who can teach reading and writing and a tolerable knowledge of arithmetic, even without grammar, to their boys in the winter evenings; and if so, whether the Board schools are so great an improvement as we suppose?

They knew nothing of politics, these hardworking rustic folk. No newspaper was ever seen in the cottage in the dimness of the eighteenth century. When there was a victory they huzzaed, without well knowing why: and yet "my father was a partisan of the Americans" in the war which startled the country and the century as

nothing had done before. It was the first enlightening principle which woke the old tranquillity of indifference; "he would not have suffered his best friend to drink success to the king's arms at his table." Cobbett, who went through several changes of opinion afterwards, came to think this "a mistaken prejudice" on his father's part; but it is very curious to find so much independent opinion at such a period and on so low a level of society. From this humble but worthy home the boy ran off at sixteen, moved by the spirit of adventure and desire to see the world. After a time spent in London in an attorney's office, where, among other valuable discoveries, he found out that he could not spell, he enlisted, and as there was no war going on at the moment, and a great deal of leisure afforded to the young recruit, he set to work to educate himself. It is a curious proof of the difference between a youth sprung from the uneducated classes, and one who is in the habit of hearing moderately correct English from his cradle, that Cobbett's first literary study was a Grammar which he "studied with unremitting attention," writing out the entire book two or three times, and getting it by heart. By this means he taught himself to write "without falling into very gross errors." The racy English he afterwards wrote and poured in such floods upon the world was then unthought of, and all that he cared for was to be able to copy General Debeig's correspondence. He became a smart and efficient soldier, sergeant-major in his regiment, popular with everybody, and obtained his discharge after eight years service with "thanks for his behaviour and conduct." After this he married a girl whom he had seen at work eight years before at daybreak on a winter's morning, "out in the snow scouring out a wash tub." "That's the girl for me," the young soldier had said to himself. His choice seems to have been the turning

point of his life. Had she not been faithful to him, he would have married another lady with whom he met in the meantime, and settled as a farmer, and lost all the grandeur of his after career. "My rare conduct and great natural talents would then have failed of the success that afterwards attended them," he says, so that honesty in love proved the best policy for the future journalist and Member of Parliament. His wife, if not of the same talents, was as magnanimous as himself. He had met her in Nova Scotia, and when the regiment to which her father belonged was ordered back to Woolwich, it occurred to Cobbett that his Mary might not find herself happy in a soldier's crowded quarters: upon which ground he confided to his betrothed his entire savings, a hundred and fifty guineas, that she might keep herself comfortably until he could follow and marry her. When he returned to England, however, he found her a maid-of-all-work with five pounds a year, and the first thing she did was to put back into his hands his hundred and fifty guineas untouched. No doubt this was the girl for the future demagogue.

After his marriage he went to America, where, with characteristic pugnacity, the young Englishman, then a determined king's man and Tory, with all the unpromising partisanship which becomes a soldier, flung himself at the head of the new-formed nation in a series of warm animadversions upon their conduct and politics. His first production was an assault upon Dr. Priestley, then newly arrived in America in all the odour of political martyrdom, a sufferer for his opinions. "His landing was nothing to me," Cobbett says; "but the fulsome and consequential addresses sent him by pretended patriots, at once calculated to flatter the people here, and to degrade his country and *mine*, was something to me,"—and he flew into print with a pamphlet intended

to be called "The Tartuffe detected," but which was published with the milder title of *Observations on the Emigration of a Martyr to the cause of Liberty*. After this he produced various fiery tracts of a similar description,—*A Bone to Gnaw for the Democrats, A Kick for a Bite*, etc. etc., signed by Peter Porcupine—pamphlets so keen in racy abuse and national spirit that the author made an immediate reputation, notwithstanding the dislike of the American people to criticism. These compositions were interrupted by the discovery that his publisher had taken the liberty to "promise a continuation, and that it should be made very interesting:" which Cobbett took for an engagement that he, *he* the champion Englishman, should do what a bookseller told him, and write to please his customers!—"No," he shrieks, "if all his customers, if all the Congress, with the President at the head, had come and solicited me—nay, had my life depended upon a compliance, I would not have written another line!" He then turned publisher himself, to spite the man who had thus insulted him, opening a shop "as being at once a means of getting money and of propagating writings against the French." It was thought a dangerous step by his friends, who entreated him at least to put no "aristocratical portraits" in his windows; but this advice was enough to set the dare-devil in a blaze. The question was, whether "to set all danger at defiance, or live in everlasting subjection to the prejudices and caprices of the democratical mob." Needless to say which course of action commended itself to Cobbett. He filled his windows with portraits of kings, queens, princes and nobles, George the Third in the place of honour. "I had all the English ministers, several of the bishops and judges, the most famous admirals, and, in short, every picture that I thought likely to excite rage in the enemies of Great Britain."

Upon this a hand-to-hand fight ensued between the insulted Commonwealth and its officials on the one side, and William Cobbett, *alias* Peter Porcupine, late sergeant-major in His Majesty's forces, on the other. The dauntless "foreigner" was beaten eventually as a matter of course, but not before he had made the very air resound with wild blows right and left, at the country, the Government, and private individuals, it did not matter whom. When he evacuated the field of battle at last, it was with colours flying and pride unabated. The encounter is amusing and characteristic, and would be as humorous an outburst of foolhardy daring as ever offended common sense and delighted national sentiment, had not the bold monarchist, the national champion, turned round to the other side as soon as he found himself in the regions where it was orthodox to be loyal. It is curious to know that the *Weekly Register* was begun with the pure principles of Conservatism, and that in Cobbett's first prosecution for libel, all kinds of eminent Tory personages bore witness to his character as "a strong defender of the king and constitution," "a zealous supporter of the monarchy." In a few years after his return to England he had turned entirely to the other side, reversing the operation of time and self-interest on so many of his contemporaries, whose change from youthful republicanism to soberer views was explained by the maturing of their minds, as well as in some cases by the opening up of their worldly prospects. Cobbett, for his part, seemed incapable of holding any opinion after it was fully proved to him that it was the opinion of the reigning class, and that honour and advancement in the ordinary meaning of the words lay that way. To snatch popularity and profit from the expression of sentiments which were all but rebellious, and to keep his standing in the very teeth of superior power, was his dearest ambition.



He was in and out of prison at intervals during the next dozen years, sometimes for "seditious libels"—sometimes for audacious comments upon the action of Government. His longest term of imprisonment was in consequence of his animadversions upon the flogging of men in a militia regiment, a freedom which cost him a thousand pounds and two years in Newgate. Some time later he was obliged to flee to America a second time to escape the action of a new law which was passed in Parliament, with a special view to the punishment of such offences—but neither imprisonment nor exile prevented the appearance of the *Weekly Register*, which he went on launching at the head of all in power, reducing its price at one time, and calling his thunderbolts "Twopenny Trash," in order to reach a wider audience. He came back from America in a calmer condition of affairs after the Peninsular War was over, when the State, less alarmed by the internal heavings of the popular volcano, had abolished the law aimed against him and his rebellious brethren of the press—but the return of the once devoted champion of kingly rights was now considered, in some places, dangerous to the national peace. The authorities of Manchester forbade his entrance into their town, and published placards, warning all well-disposed citizens to stay indoors, in case he should force his way into their streets. This born revolutionary had by that time changed all his principles, and was not only republican, but free-thinking, bringing with him, as sacred relics, from America, the bones of Tom Paine, a name which made the hair stand erect on the head of British virtue. A great part of the wild prejudice against him was doubtless due to the mad brag of sedition, irreligion, and disloyalty thus made, and the association with his own of a name of such bad repute. Never was there such a squalid version of an apotheosis; and Cobbett soon discovered that even to the

most advanced free-thinkers and the wildest revolutionary the martyr of his ignorant and hot-headed fancy was an unsavoury saint.

It would be vain, however, to attempt to follow the entire course of this extraordinary egotist and braggart. He was throughout all his life a consistent type of a stubborn English clown, his mind entirely untouched by any ameliorating influences from the grammar which had formed his education, and quite incapable of perceiving the relations of affairs, or taking anything but the most positive and practical view of things around him. Thus he never actually changed his mind at all through all the apparent divergences of his opinion. His principle was opposition to the powers that be, in violent reaction from that submission to the same powers which he was born to. His supposed education so laboriously and conscientiously acquired, the "rare conduct and great natural talents" of which he was so sincerely conscious, added to a natural delight in fighting, and intense sense of his own superior wisdom, all tended to produce this reaction. He was the Hampden of the fields, not mute nor inglorious, mixing up the shrewdest natural wit with the most impenetrable obtusity, seeing vividly in one small circle, but outside it not at all, and bringing the spirit of fierce village quarrels, and personal feuds, with all the unbounded power of vituperation which belongs to them, the sudden offence, the spite and fiery intolerance of the uneducated, into public affairs: a strange evidence of how the absence of the atmosphere of education tells upon those who have emancipated themselves from actual ignorance. But this very positivism and personal consistency of opposition had a force upon the multitude which reason and moderation seldom possess—and Cobbett was on the whole, notwithstanding all his misfortunes, a prosperous man. He got into Parliament before he died, and, sobered by that

responsibility, conducted himself there with greater moderation than at any other period of his life.

But, on the other hand, Cobbett was master of the most excellent and vigorous English, simple, nervous, and to the point. Even his long expositions of past quarrels, and spiteful, personal attacks upon men dead and forgotten, have a certain interest, so living is the narrative, full of hot impulse and feeling, and boundless graphic detail. And in the foreground of everything he writes, the centre of all, is always that lively, amusing, hot-headed, wrong-headed self, a being inaccessible to reason, swayed by sudden impulses, by rapid mistaken impressions, by side gleams of confused reflection and distorted perspective so far as concerned the great public affairs into which he rashly threw himself without training for the work or understanding of its real bearings. But when we turn to the other side of his character, and find him in scenes which he thoroughly understands, in the fresh rural landscapes, and humble thrifty houses, and village economics among which he was bred, he is a very different person. Occasionally we come to a bit of fine observation of nature which would not have misbecome White of Selborne: and his pictures of home-scenery are often as touching and real in English sweetness and homely subdued beauty as if they had come from the hands of Gainsborough or Constable. In this branch of art he has no violent effects, no tempest or passion, but the soft veiled skies, the hazy distance, the cheerful homesteads of a purely English landscape, with the birds singing all about, the larks in the grass, the swallows under the eaves. And here his constitutional brag, and sense that what *he* does must always be admirable, cannot take away the excellent good sense of his advice, or the inspiring spirit of domestic love, honesty, and truth, which is his principle of education. He was himself far too busy, too perpetually occupied, too

wrong-headed, to learn anything out of the larger lessons of life in his own person: but his system of training, as he expounds it, is far more liberal, more noble and generous, than anything else in him, and his love and appreciation of the country and domestic life are always fine. It was to be sure the picture of an individual house among productive gardens and blossomed trees, where his work was absolute, and himself regarded as the first of mankind, which was Cobbett's symbol of rural life. But in that home he was no doubt worthy of the love and sway he demanded. Here is a little vignette, taken at random, which is not a bad instance of his power. He has been describing with all the self-sufficiency of a man who has travelled and seen the world, and who has made his way, and has everything handsome about him, the impression of smallness and insignificance made upon his mind by the scenery of his native village when he returns to it—till nature suddenly seizes him, and reveals, notwithstanding all his pride and good-fortune, the heart still beating in his well-to-do breast.

“Everything was become so pitifully small: I had to cross in my postchaise the long and dreary heath of Bagshot, then, at the end of it, to mount a hill called Hungry Hill; and from that hill I knew I should look down into the beautiful and fertile vale of Farnham. My heart fluttered with impatience mixed with a sort of fear to see all the scenes of my childhood. There is a hill not far from the town called Crooksbury Hill, which rises up out of a flat in the form of a cone, and is planted with Scotch fir-trees. This hill was a famous object in the neighbourhood. It served as the superlative degree of height. . . . Therefore, the first object that my eyes sought was this hill. I could not believe my eyes—literally speaking, I for a moment thought the famous hill removed, and a little heap put in its stead; for I had seen in New Brunswick a single rock, or hill of solid rock, ten times as big, and four or five times as high. The postboy, going down hill, and not a bad road, whisked me in a few minutes to the Bush Inn, from the garden of which I could see the prodigious sandhill where I had begun my gardening works. What a nothing! But now came

rushing into my mind all at once my pretty little garden, my little blue smock frock, my little nailed shoes, my pretty pigeons that I used to feed out of my hands, the last kind words and tears of my gentle and tender-hearted and affectionate mother! I hastened back into the room. If I had looked a moment longer I should have dropped"— —

And if we added another line the sentiment would drop down ten fathoms deep into bathos and vanity: for this strange mixture of a man, with the tears still in his eyes, immediately looks down upon his clothes to reflect, what a change! and remembering that he had dined the day before in company with Mr. Pitt, and been waited upon by men in gaudy liveries, he puffs out his chest, and swells his feathers with the habitual brag. "I had nobody to assist me in the world, no teachers of any sort; nobody to shelter me from the consequences of bad, and no one to counsel me to good behaviour. I felt proud"—— Thus was formed one of the most notable demagogues of his time. All his warm energy and passion have not been sufficient to keep him from oblivion, but yet there are many pages in his works that the world should not willingly let die.

While so many humble persons were having their say in the literature of their times, two of the richest men of the day also came upon the stage, with a whimsical variation in the tone. They have each retained the name of the productions that gave them fame. We still speak of "Anastasius" Hope, and recognise the other as Beckford of Vathek more easily than if we called him Beckford of Fonthill, though it is true that neither the names of the books nor those of the men produce now a very lively impression on the present generation. Curiously enough, both of these millionaire writers were men whose wealth forms one of the chief features of their character, persons of magnificent tastes, living like princes, or rather like those eastern potentates, whose houses and

habits are too gorgeous for anything but an Oriental legend or fairy tale. Beckford was the son of one of the wealthiest of Englishmen, the representative of a rich West Indian family—Jamaica being in those days a golden island, as rich as it is now poor—upon whom money poured from all sides, and who was like Whittington, twice, if not three times, Lord Mayor of London. Never was a young prince more surrounded by worship and observance than the young heir to “one of the first fortunes in the kingdom,” whose wealth was increased by the savings of a long minority, and who, when he came into possession of his fortune, seemed, to the dazzled imaginations of all around, to have the whole world before him. His youth was spent in wandering over the earth in all the most beautiful scenes, and with all the advantages of a wealthy Englishman—tutor, physician, and a suite of servants accompanying the young man in his wanderings. This luxurious training and abstraction from all the rougher encounters of schoolboy life, which now would be thought doubly necessary as ballast to so much wealth, helped to confirm young Beckford in those weaknesses of character which made him in after years a luxurious recluse, something between a hermit and a Sultan, a shy and proud man accustomed to follow his own caprices, and to live surrounded by parasites and flatterers, intolerant of the equality of ordinary society, and that operation of “finding your level,” which it is the highest mission of fashion now-a-days to carry out.

Very early in life, in his twenty-second year, Beckford wrote *Vathek*—with characteristic caprice in French; and it was not till some years later that an English translation saw the light. Thus, bizarre in this point as in others, his work appeared in his native language only at second hand, an English audience, or indeed any audience at all, being apparently indifferent to the young potentate whose

pleasure it was to compose a story for his own entertainment. He had always been disposed to study the Oriental languages and literature ; and gave up Latin and Greek, as soon as he was his own master, for Persian and Arabic. The story of Vathek is a wild parable of crime and punishment, with gleams of modern humour quaintly incongruous with the form of the Eastern apologue. Thus we are told that the hero, "ninth Caliph of the race of the Abbassides, and grandson of Haroun-al-Raschid," had an agreeable and majestic countenance—but when he was angry, one of his eyes became so terrible, that nobody dared look at him ; the unfortunate person upon whom his gaze was fixed immediately fell back, and sometimes died on the instant. "For which cause, in fear of depopulating his states, and making his palace a desert, this prince permitted himself to be angry very rarely." His palace, which is full of unimaginable pleasures and delights, is described with all the unction of a builder of palaces ; and around the prince, who is himself a mildly pitiless despot, unconscious that there can be any will in the world but his own, is a group of vaguely yet cleverly indicated figures—his mother, Carathis, who is a Greek, curious in every kind of forbidden learning and grotesque diablerie, his fussy Vizier, envious and servile, and a comic eunuch, fat and important, whose life is made a burden to him by the caprices of the ladies under his care.

Vathek himself, having everything that he can desire, is naturally weary, and longing for a little more. He is visited after some time by a hideous Indian pedlar who brings wonderful wares, but will not speak to him, and cannot be slain even by the terrors of his eye, and who escapes from the prison where he has been placed, leaving behind some mysterious sabres with inscriptions, which, being with difficulty deciphered, tantalise the prince with

descriptions of the country in which they were made, which is worthy of the greatest prince in the world. When a long delay has wrought the Caliph to the verge of madness, this hideous Giaour reappears, and after some ludicrous preliminaries, offers to Vathek riches and glory, to which his present state is as nothing, on condition of his renouncing the faith of Mahomet. To this the prince agrees with much ease, cementing his compact by treating his new and grim ally to the blood of fifty children—a regale upon which the Indian insists. To procure this a great feast to the children of the city is proclaimed; and Vathek, selecting fifty of the noblest, leads them out with games and rejoicing, something as the Pied Piper of Hamelin did in after days, till they reach the edge of a pit, into which he flings them one by one with great cheerfulness. This naturally leads to a trifling disturbance in the city, caused by the unreasonable fathers and mothers; but, notwithstanding, Vathek sets out with great pomp on the journey prescribed to him by the Giaour: on which, however, he is stopped by a romantic adventure, falling in love with the daughter of an Emir who offers him hospitality on the way. When he has possessed himself of this lovely lady, Nouronibas by name, at the cost of her father's life, and by breaking all the laws of hospitality, offences of which she is a willing partaker, he is recalled by the sudden arrival of his mother to the necessity of proceeding on his way. The Giaour had promised to open to him the palace of subterranean fire, and to put him in possession of the treasures accumulated by the pre-Adamite Sultans. Both Carathis and Nouronibas are eager for these acquisitions, and he resumes his journey, accompanied by his bride. When they reach the hall of Eblis, the end of their journey, the description reaches a kind of Dantesque grandeur. Full of eager expectation, the new-comers pass through a great



hall full of pale figures coming and going ceaselessly, taking no notice one of the other, and holding each his hand pressed upon his heart. This alarms them a little, but they are reassured by Eblis himself, who tells them that all the wealth in his dominions, and power indescribable over all the Genii, so that whatever they wish will instantly be performed, are at their disposal. They are then led into an inner hall, where are the Sultans of the past, whose measureless riches they are about to enjoy. They are, however, appalled to find these potentates laid out in a terrible torpor upon biers of cedar wood, just sufficiently alive to feel their misery. The first and greatest among them is King Solomon, who, as the new-comers approach his bed, lifts up a solemn voice, and informs them of their sin and misery. When he concludes, he throws up his hands, one of which has been on his heart like all the rest, and the terrified spectators see his side transparent like crystal and his heart in flames.

“At this terrible sight Nouronibas fell as if petrified into the arms of Vathek. ‘O Giaour!’ said that unhappy prince, ‘whither hast thou led us? Let us go from this place. I free thee from all thy promises. O Mahomet! is there no mercy for us?’ ‘No, there is no more mercy for you,’ answered the pitiless Genius; ‘know that this is the sojourn of despair and revenge. Thy heart shall burn like that of all the worshippers of Eblis: a few days are allowed thee before that fatal moment, use them as thou wilt; make thy bed of gold, command the infernal powers, survey these immense caverns at thy pleasure, no gate shall be closed before thee. As for me, I have fulfilled my mission.’”

The wretched lovers have, however, no inclination now to attempt to enjoy the pleasures for which they encountered their doom. They roam about the dismal place awaiting their fate in all the despair of anticipation. The only use Vathek makes of his power is to order the Genii, with vindictive rage, to bring his mother, the corrupter of his youth, that she at least may share their torments.

Carathis comes ; and once more it is the spirit of modern humour which breaks into the gloomy tale. The inquisitive witch, greedy of power and knowledge and money, is not the least discomposed by the gloomy scene. The half-dead kings are nothing to her. She exerts her newly-acquired power at once, compels the Genius to show her all their treasures, snatches at all their charms and talismans, and, when the fatal moment comes, is struck by it in the midst of a crowd of obsequious spirits whose homage she has exacted.

These scenes are really powerful. They are far more striking than Southey's pyrotechnic horrors, and recall in the pale crowds, whose horrible indifference to everything but their own tortures makes of each one a hopeless solitary, something like the terrible hell of Dante. It is curious that the most luxurious dreamer of his time, the lavish, wealthy, self-indulging master of the only fairy palace of modern times, should have produced this one gloomy picture, in which there seems a subtle mockery of his own life as well as that of his hero—and should have done no more.

He did do more, however: he built a wonderful palace, Fonthill Abbey, close to the very handsome house which his wealthy father had built, but which the son demolished as not important enough for him. He made his new building into a palace of enchantment, the wonder of its day, filling it with everything that was gorgeous and costly. Annoyed by the intrusion of sportsmen on his grounds, he had a wall of twelve feet high, extending to a distance of seven miles, built round his property. Within this enclosure hundreds of workmen laboured at the new palace, to which he gave, one does not know why, the name of Abbey. Sometimes when it pleased his caprice to hurry the work, it was continued by night, by torchlight. When the house was completed

it was furnished in the same magnificent manner. "He deposited diamonds in a china cup," says the awed and admiring narrator of all these wonderful doings. Inside the seven miles of wall, nineteen hundred acres of ground afforded every variety of beautiful scenery, landscapes both soft and wild, space enough for every kind of recreation. The establishment included, besides a host of servants, a physician, a learned antiquary, who acted as secretary, and a musician of great accomplishment. Vathek himself had scarcely a combination of delights more stately and splendid than were included within. "The ladies," spoken of in bated breath, two daughters whom his young wife, dying after three years of marriage, had left to him, lived in a house in the park, with an establishment of their own, where their education was carried on as if they had been princesses. In this wonderful retirement Beckford lived for many years, until his fortune, which had been diminished by various losses, proved insufficient to keep up the vast expenditure which the house required. Instead of diminishing the expenditure, he sold the place. Perhaps by this time he had got tired of his vast plaything. But he immediately proceeded to make himself another house, scarcely less splendid, though smaller than Fonthill, in Bath, where all his most cherished treasures were removed, and where he lived and died. A more strange episode was never worked out upon the sober web of literary history. Our space does not permit any account of the finery, the splendour and beautiful things with which he was surrounded. But this lover of the beautiful cast off his eldest daughter, who would not marry another millionaire as he wished, and left her to languish in poverty, while he transferred everything he had to give and to leave to her sister, who did her duty and married a duke of her father's choice.

Thomas Hope had, if not a breeding so luxurious as

that of Beckford, at least, like him, the advantage or disadvantage of almost boundless fortune, and many similar tastes. He did not shut himself up in costly and fastidious seclusion, but he was one of the first to make an elaborate study of furniture and decoration, and his luxurious and splendid houses were part of himself and inseparable from his life. He was Dutch by origin, a merchant of Amsterdam, where the family still keep up their business connection. Eastern travel was perhaps, in those days, considering the much increased rate of travelling in general, more usual than now—the shores of the Levant having attractions besides those which occupy the tourist. Hope, no doubt, had unusual facilities for understanding the details of Oriental life, and his one tale is an elaborate exposition of Eastern society, of the Turks and the Greeks of that age when Turkey was still an appreciable power, and Greece an unformed nation, oppressed and rebellious, acknowledged by nobody. The story of Anastasius is that of a rascally Greek, cunning, subtle, and treacherous, according to the conventional idea of his race. It is very long, very elaborate: the tale is delayed continually, to furnish us with details of the varied life of the court, the harems, the mercenaries, the suspicions and dangers amid which both rulers and favourites lived. It is a story of adventure and manners, rather than of character, since there is no one who attracts the reader's regard throughout, and the hero himself is an odious schemer, whose successes and misfortunes are equally far from attracting our sympathy. But the book had a success which we cannot see that it deserved, and has rescued its author from the oblivion, which even wealth has no spell against, at least, in so far as this, that everybody in his own generation had heard of it, and that even now a vague sense of identification comes to the public mind when any one, asking to what Hopes

a well-known family belongs, is answered not by any technical designation or county title, but by the name of Anastasius, a curious distinction—so small, yet enough to outlive a great many more substantial things.

Another writer who flourished in the end of the century, a little preceding some of those here mentioned, has a special interest for us, not only for his own productions, but for the strange genius mixed with much alloy, but yet genius still—more remarkable than any other of his father's works—who has descended to us from him. Isaac Disraeli was the son of a Jew, not of the merely moneyed kind, with which we are most familiar, but of those who boast a high European lineage, as well as the misty honours of Eastern centuries. The family, according to the account given by its last distinguished member, had gone from Spain to Venice in the fifteenth century, where it adopted, in gratitude for its escape from Torquemada and the Inquisition, the name of Disraeli, "a name never borne before or since by any other family." The father of Lord Beaconsfield sprang from a race of keen and successful merchants, but was himself most strangely unlike them, a dreamy recluse and student, breaking all the traditions of his family with such an obstinate if gentle and sentimental impracticability, that nothing was possible but to leave him to the pursuit of his studies and fancies. From his childhood he showed himself "doomed his father's soul to cross;" and his mother was a passionate and discontented personage, who had "imbibed a dislike for her race," and was "so mortified by her social position, that she lived until eighty without indulging in a tender expression"—a most uncomfortable parent. The young Isaac, after an unhappy childhood, drove his father frantic by "producing a poem," which seemed to the wealthy merchant to promise only beggary and ruin to his only child. "The unhappy poet was

consigned like a bale of goods" to the correspondent of the firm at Amsterdam. When he returned at eighteen he was "a disciple of Rousseau," burning to prove himself the most sentimental and tender of sons to the mother whose indifference he had probably forgotten. But when he would have flung himself upon her bosom, the lady "burst into derisive laughter," ridiculing at once himself and his appearance, which was eccentric and unusual. "Whereupon," says his son, "Emile, of course, went into heroics, wept, sobbed, and finally, shut up in his chamber, composed an impassioned epistle. My grandfather, to soothe him, dwelt on the united solicitude of his parents for his welfare, and broke to him their intention, if it was agreeable to him, to place him in the establishment of a great merchant at Bordeaux. My father replied that he had written a poem of considerable length which he wished to publish, against Commerce, which was the corruption of man!"

The impracticable youth, however, was not always persecuted: such parental severities can last only for a time, and though the gentle sufferer in this rich household was not over happy, yet by and by he emancipated himself. His first publication was some "polished and pointed" verses on the Abuse of Satire, aimed at the famous "Peter Pindar" Wolcot, then maintaining a free fight against all the powers that were. The "effusion" had such success as was possible, enough to fill the journals and startle the stern parents with their son's fame. Shortly after he made the acquaintance of young Samuel Rogers, then gaining his little reputation as a poet, and of "Mr. Pye"—a celebrity whom even the encyclopædias scorn, and of whom we know nothing save that he was Poet-Laureate (!) before Southey took and vindicated the office. He was "a master of correct versification," Lord Beaconsfield says. Young Disraeli did not reach even so

far as young Rogers on the soft little slopes of Parnassus, but he was led to the odd byway of literature in which he gained his reputation, by means of a residence in Exeter, which brought him into the literary circle then flourishing there. Here, as so often before, a new and gentle group of amateur writers opens upon us once more. Exeter, like Lichfield, was full of gentlemen who could all compose agreeable verses, the chief among them being Dr. Downman, "a poet and physician, and the best of men." The names of Hole and of Hayter say little to posterity, and of all the group the only well-known name is that of the composer Jackson, who was also, according to Lord Beaconsfield, "an author of high æsthetical speculation." "It was said," the same authority adds, "that the two principal if not sole organs of periodical criticism at that time, I think the *Critical Review* and the *Monthly Review*, were principally supported by Exeter contributions." It is not usual now-a-days to find a little local school of letters in every country town, and society is no longer parcelled out into pieces, but hangs together from one centre in a way perhaps more complete but not so picturesque as of old; but it is curious to find starting up about us, as we pursue our investigations, another and another long-forgotten circle, all conscious of excellence, and many perhaps looking for nothing less than immortality.

Isaac Disraeli was, as has been said, a poet to begin with, like so many of his compeers. The kind and good Sir Walter, with that capacious memory in which all kinds of strays and waifs found refuge, and with that genial desire to give everybody he met pleasure, which in him was never insincere, met the collector of literary curiosities years after, with the delightful compliment of "reciting a poem of half-a-dozen stanzas," which Disraeli had written in this early period. "Not altogether with-

out agitation," says his biographer, "surprise was expressed that the lines should have been known, still more that they should have been remembered." "Ah!" said Sir Walter, "if the writer of these lines had gone on, he would have been an English poet."

This, however, whether he could or could not have attained it, was not to be. Chance directed him to the quiet byways of literature, in which he achieved a mild but complete success. The *Curiosities of Literature* is more interesting than many a book of higher pretensions, and some of Mr. Disraeli's essays were good and able: but, perhaps, had not his son arisen greater than he, we should have thought less of the father: and granting the interest of his chief publication, there is no sort of greatness in it, nor original power. The character of the man, however, as given by his son, affords us a very clear and concise sketch of the literary workman. "He had not a single passion or prejudice," says this unquestionable authority. "He disliked business, and he never required relaxation. He rose to enter the chamber where he lived alone with his books, and at night his lamp was ever lit within the same walls. In London his only amusement was to ramble among booksellers. In the country he scarcely ever left his room but to saunter in abstraction upon a terrace, muse over a chapter, or coin a sentence." He had arrived at the mature age of forty-five "before his career as a great author influencing opinions really commenced." The reader at this distance will perhaps imagine, wonderingly, whether that career ever commenced at all. He lived to be a very old man, like so many of the subjects of this history. Great genius may exhaust and wear out, though chiefly when associated with great passions; but a little genius is a wonderfully safe and comfortable possession. It gives interest to life whatever may be its burdens, and cheers the weary years.



Disraeli published some historical books, one of them an elaborate work on the *Life and Reign of Charles I.*, and various essays, one of which, the *Essay on Literary Character*, his son considers "the most perfect of his compositions," besides many shorter articles. But the work by which he will be known is the *Curiosities of Literature*, though it is neither the most ambitious nor the most serious of his productions.

It seems scarcely necessary to refer again to the two sisters, Sophia and Harriet Lee, who have been already named, the authors of the *Canterbury Tales*, stories not important enough to have any national value, though they have lived longer than they had any particular right to do, and may still be found in old libraries: nor to good Mr. Bage near Tamworth, whom Godwin, about the time when he tried to persecute and argue Miss Harriet Lee into marrying him, went out of his way to see, asking, "Are not such men as much worth visiting as palaces, towns, and cathedrals?" Bage was born a miller, and was a well-to-do person with paper-mills, beside those that ground the grain. To "dissipate his melancholy" under some special trouble, he began to write novels; and afterwards, when he had formed the habit, went on producing them methodically one every two years, as children are born in well-regulated families. Where have all those children of the fancy gone? "Hernsprong," which Godwin reports to be "his sixth," very much indeed as if it had been a baby, is the one that is best known.

We will not turn back to Hannah More, though she was no older than several of the writers here described. She too, amid her band of maiden sisters, was still living and writing when the century began, and *Cælebs in search of a Wife* was not published till 1805; but she was a woman of the Johnsonian age, with little opening in her to the promise of the new times to come.

Another gentle figure, however, which is altogether modern, came into the world in the end of the old century, in Liverpool; then a much less important and bustling place, with no such overwhelming rush of trade and commercial activity as now, with its old church surveying the old quays and great river, lively and brisk with traffic although smoke and steam were absent. Felicia Hemans was all that the daintily cultivated flower of a wealthy merchant family is apt to be—over sweet, over refined, in natural contrast to the primitive vigour and stronger atmosphere of her birthplace. But she was not brought up among the traders in the wealthy town, under the shadow of the wings of Roscoe and his court, but in Wales, where her family retired after some mercantile catastrophe. She was Felicia Brown in those days, and the embodiment of a muse such as Gray or Collins would have drawn—"distinguished from her cradle by extreme beauty and precocious talents." At fifteen she had already published a volume of little poems, which some heartless critic handled roughly. "The young poetess was then . . . in the full glow of that radiant beauty which was destined to fade so early. The mantling bloom of her cheeks was shaded by a profusion of natural ringlets of a rich golden brown; and the ever-varying expression of her brilliant eyes gave a changeful play to her countenance, which would have made it impossible for any painter to do justice to it." Whoever the wretched being might have been that cut her pretty verses to pieces in his obscurity in 1808, who could now lay a hand upon this pretty creature? Her poems are like this description of herself. They are always sweet, liquid, and melodious: they mean as much as so soft and beautiful a nature ever requires to mean: "Sweet records, promises as sweet"—the gentle sentiments that lie on the surface, subdued sorrows, chastened happiness. She married in her Welsh solitude

a certain Captain Hemans, "by no means destitute of advantages, either of person or education," with whom her life was not happy—but who was so kind as to take himself away before things grew intolerable, leaving to her the undisturbed possession of her children, which was enough for happiness of a moderate kind. Her little biography is very reticent, but the glimpses it gives of the rural household, the boys and their mother, are very pretty and touching. The group of children, whose "heroine" is "mamma,"—one of whom sprang up from his Latin exercise, and shouted out, "Now I am sure mamma is a better poet than Lord Byron"—surround her with such a soft background of cherub faces as suits at once her pretty genius and her gentle personality. She wrote a great many poems which children will always willingly learn, and gentle souls admire—full of tenderness and soft pathos, and the purest sentiments. In the first half of the century she was the first love of the girls in poetry, as Scott was the first love of the boys. But by this time her works have faded like a bouquet of flowers. They continue to be printed (we think) in pretty editions, and sold—but it is with a smile that we hear of the great fame of Mrs. Hemans. She died young, and her little story is throughout most tender and touching. And her verses linger in the memories of people who are growing old, with echoes and fragrances in them of their own youth—but are gone out of mortal ken for any more important use.

About the same time, in Manchester, another poet of the same gentle kind, but who never reached to the same distinction, and whose name is scarcely remembered at all, lived and flourished. She was the friend of Wordsworth, and left an interesting reputation behind her, mingling to some degree in the literary activity of the time, writing critical articles and general literature, as

well as now and then the sweetness of a little poem; while at the same time bringing up, as well as an elder sister could, a family of orphan children. Save for her connection with Wordsworth, and the similarity of her slight productions and position to those of Mrs. Hemans, it would be scarcely worth while to place the name of Maria Jewsbury on record at all. Her sister Geraldine took, at a much later period, a respectable rank as a novelist. Manchester does not seem to have had any pretension, like its neighbour town, to be a literary centre. Here is the only little glimpse of a taper which at that moment it seems to have possessed.

If we were to say that Bishop Heber was a sort of male twin to Mrs. Hemans, we fear that the comparison would be received with little favour by many readers. So few of the poets of the time accomplished all the rites of education, and trained themselves, as ancient tradition bade, on the classic models, that it is disappointing to find, in the rare instance of a fully-qualified academical poet, an example so little remarkable as this excellent and blameless soul. In the dearth of writers properly marked with the sign-manual of the Universities, it ought to be noted that Heber gained the prize of poetry at Oxford, fulfilled all his studies there with distinction, and became a Fellow of All-Souls. So much for so little! But it has never ceased to be true that poets must be born, and cannot be made. He was the son of a clerical race: of a nature born to goodness and every excellence, with nothing wayward in him or irregular. His poems are the utterance of the most spotless of well-regulated minds and devout spirits. It is doubtful whether the best of poets ever produced anything more widely known and popular than the "Missionary Hymn" about "Greenland's icy mountains," or that which celebrates the Star in the East of the Epiphany. So that this mild singer had his reward

of the most liberal kind in the affectionate enthusiasm with which the simple-hearted religious crowd regards the writers of its sacred songs. The kind of tranquil life he led, and the boundless correspondence which proceeded from his rectory, have been put before the world on various occasions. His letters were voluminous and fluent, and always, it need hardly be said, perfect in sentiment: but they have few literary attractions. He became Bishop of Calcutta in 1823, and addressed himself to his work there with great courage and faithfulness, dying of it in a very few years—an end which has given him, to many, something of the sanctity of a martyr.

Another poet of the same culture, and of more ambitious pretensions, was Dean Milman; like Heber, the author of a prize poem, and distinguished in his University: but not, unfortunately, born to a more successful issue in this branch of attainment. When Heber had subsided into a country living, Milman was Professor of Poetry in Oxford, a post which ought to involve a crown of poetical honour not much below that of the Laureate; and he was perhaps the best poet living who had any right to a place within those academical precincts—which was not saying much. He made some very bold and ambitious ventures in the poetical drama, and succeeded so far as to have his tragedy of *Fazio* acted at Drury Lane. But the public did not sustain his claims to the name of poet, and he has fallen into the limbo of poetical writers, like those who “*senza speme vivono in disio*.” His more important work, however, held a different place, and the man who is recognised as the historian of Latin Christianity does not need to break his heart over the failure of poetic fame.

In a still more humble obscurity, in distant spots in the country—in Bedfordshire, the *Farmer's Boy* Bloomfield; in Suffolk, the mild young Quaker poet, Bernard Barton; in hardheaded Yorkshire, the rude and fervent

spirit—usually inspired with political themes, but sometimes dropping into unexpected strains of tenderness—of Ebenezer Elliot; in Lincolnshire, among the level fields, a village minstrel, John Clare, ploughboy and peasant—not much more than glow-worms about the hedgerows, still kept a little flicker about of poetical light. The better part of Elliot's productions, the often stirring and effective strains which got him the name of the Corn Law Rhymers, were of a later date; but these softer chorus-singers had all begun in the early morning of the century to swell the greater voices which had made of that new period a renowned and great poetic age.

In another branch of literature another most charming and feminine figure appears out of the rural shades, from the village scenery, which was her best inspiration, towards the end of the first quarter of the century, beyond which we do not pretend to go in this record. (Jane Austen, a greater competitor for fame, we reserve for a separate notice.) The name of Mary Russell Mitford is one which recalls to us many of the most delightful idyllic sketches in the language. The landscape clears round her, the village roofs ascend, the little town builds itself in the clear sunshiny atmosphere, where merit, sometimes depressed, is always happy in the end, and every wrong is righted and every mistake made clear. She was the daughter of a foolish prodigal, an attractive and dashing fine gentleman, a sort of man, fortunately, more common in novels than in life, who wasted his daughter's money and lived upon her affection, shutting her out from everything in life but his own service. She, always cheerful, tender, and patient, contentedly resigned comfort and tranquillity, as well as fortune and position, in order that he should have everything he wanted, and when their money was spent, worked for him with heroic devotion. The story would be a beautiful one if it were not too painful

to see one life thus sacrificed to the caprices of another. Filial devotion is heavenly, but it rouses a sort of moral indignation when we see how its very greatness is the occasion of developing unutterable meanness on the other side. This, however, is a view of self-sacrifice which it is very painful to be forced to take, and which, let us thank Heaven, is always an unpopular view. The world takes an unfailing pleasure in the spectacle of supreme and self-forgetting virtue, little as it may feel inclined to copy it. Miss Mitford did more for her father than to endow him with all her worldly goods, and when they were gone to labour for his living; she did all that in her lay with every wile of her delightful power, and all the special pleading of affection, to represent him to us as the hero which he would seem to have remained to her—the best, most benign and gracious of mankind. She was eminently well connected, taking the Russell in her name from the house of Bedford, and thus vanquished the sorest infliction of poverty, the slights and scorns of social life. Her stories and her autobiographical ramblings convey to us many glimpses of her youth, which, notwithstanding many ups and downs of fortune, had evidently no small amount of brightness in it. But her outset upon her literary career was after a far more ambitious sort than her after successes. The smiling girl, whose pretty experiences among her kindred and the rural gentry whom she sketches so happily were all of the simplest and most artless kind, and who had already cares about the butcher and the baker, though she had seen her father run through more than one fortune, suddenly stepped forth upon the world with no less a production than a tragedy, which was played upon the big stage of Drury Lane in 1823, and covered the young woman with glory. Perhaps, by the way, she was no longer a girl when this startling success took place; but she was one of those

who are always young, and the predominance of her father in her story keeps her in the position of youth. Her *Julian*, like so many other plays which at the moment secure everything that critics and listeners can say of applause and admiration, died soon after, and has never reappeared on the stage. *Rienzi* was also acted, and met with similar good fortune. They are perfectly readable now, with much pretty verse and many fine situations; but nobody thinks of reading them, nor has any theatre attempted to produce them on the stage. It is almost a commonplace to say this: it would seem to be the ordinary fate of poetical dramas of average merit, without either great genius or a powerful hold upon the intricacies of stage business.

These productions were like meteors blazing and falling. The real fame of the author rests upon a very different foundation. Whether she was cast down by the very temporary character of her first reputation, we are not told; she was at all times so reasonable, so sweet-tempered, and so ready to do what her hand found to do, that, even had she been so, it is not likely she would have made much show of her feelings. But it was after this temporary glory was over—when it was forced upon her that she was not as Shakspeare, but rather as Joanna Baillie, as Barry Cornwall—as Coleridge, ever so much greater than either—had been, a dramatist of the moment, without power to lay hold upon the public, or any real ascendancy over its imagination—that she turned to the humble everyday scenes about her, the simple stories of the hamlet, the changes and chances that befell her humble neighbours, the strain of common life. Nothing more pleasant, more touching, more fresh and odorous of the fields and farms, could be—or more true to English life and country manners. *Our Village* became as well known to the English-speaking world in a year or two as if that



collection of cottages in leafy Berkshire had been one of the centres of the world. And these delightful little pictures are still as fresh, as lifelike as ever, scarcely even old-fashioned, though there are no modern appliances in them, no telegraphs or railways, but long anxieties and waiting and patience, which, perhaps, for the poet's and the story-teller's art, are better things. Miss Mitford can scarcely be said to be a creator; but no one has clearly annexed and brought in to the realm of literature a more real piece of English soil.

JOANNA BAILLIE, born 1762; died 1851.

Published Plays on the Passions (1st volume), 1798.

" " (2d " ), 1802.

" " (3d " ), 1812.

Miscellaneous Dramas, 1804.

Family Legend, 1810.

Fugitive Verses, 1823.

Dramas, 1836.

ANNA LETITIA BARBAULD, born 1743; died 1825.

Published Poems, 1773.

Devotional Poems, 1773.

Poems, 1773.

Hymns in Prose, 1775.

Early Lessons, 1775.

Ode to the Year, 1811.

She assisted in the composition of "Evenings at Home," and edited various publications, especially a collection of British Novelists, with critical and biographical notices, published in 1810.

WILLIAM ROSCOE, born 1753; died 1831.

Published Life of Lorenzo de Medici, 1796.

Life and Pontificate of Leo X., 1805.

JOHN FOSTER, born 1770; died 1843.

Published Essays, 1805.

On the Evils of Popular Ignorance, 1819.

Contributions to the "Eclectic Review."

JANE TAYLOR, born 1783; died 1824.

ANNE TAYLOR, born 1782; died 1866.

Published Original Poems for Infant Minds, 1803.

Rhymes for the Nursery, 1806.

Essays in Rhyme, 1816.

Contributions of J. J. (Jane Taylor).

---

ISAAC TAYLOR, born 1787; died 1865.

Published Elements of Thought, 1822.

History of the Transmission of Ancient Books, 1825

Process of Historical Proof, 1826.

Natural History of Enthusiasm, 1829.

---

JAMES MONTGOMERY, born 1771; died 1854.

Published Wanderer of Switzerland, and other Poems, 1806.

The West Indies, 1807.

Prison Amusements.

The World Before the Flood, 1813.

Thoughts on Wheels, 1817.

Greenland, 1819.

The Pelican Island, 1827.

He was Editor of the Sheffield "Iris" for many years.

---

WILLIAM COBBETT, born 1762; died 1835.

Published Parliamentary History of England, 1806 to 1820.

Life of W. Cobbett, by himself, 1809.

A Year's Residence in the United States, 1818.

Cottage Economy, 1822.

Poor Man's Friend, 1826.

Emigrant's Guide, 1829.

Rural Rides, 1830.

Along with numerous other pamphlets, political and otherwise.

---

WILLIAM BECKFORD, born 1760; died 1844

Published Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters, 1780.

Vathek, 1782.

And some other works of no importance.

THOMAS HOPE, born 1770; died 1831

Published *Anastasius*, 1819.

And several works on *Architecture and the Arts of Decoration*.

---

ISAAC DISRAELI, born 1766; died 1848.

Published *Curiosities of Literature* (1st volume), 1791.

„ „ (2d „ ), 1792.

„ „ (3d „ ), 1817.

„ „ Second series, 1823.

*Calamities of Authors*, 1812.

*Quarrels of Authors*, 1814.

*Literary and Political Character of James I.*, 1816.

*Commentaries on Life and Reign of Charles I.*, 1828

*Griot, Hampden, and Pym*, 1832.

*The Amenities of Literature*, 1841.

---

FELICIA HEMANS, born 1793; died 1835.

Published *Early Poems*, 1808.

*The Domestic Affections*, 1812.

*Meeting of Wallace and Bruce*, 1819.

*The Sceptic*, 1820.

*Dartmoor*, 1821.

*Vespers of Palermo*, 1823.

*Siege of Valencia*, 1823.

*The Forest Sanctuary*, 1826

*Records of Women*, 1828.

*National Lyrics, etc.*, 1828.

*Songs of the Affections*, 1830.

*Hymns for Childhood*, 1834.

*Scenes and Hymns of Life*, 1834.

*Thoughts during Sickness*.

*Poetical Remains*, published with *Memoir* after her death, 1836.

---

REGINALD HEBER, born 1783; died 1826.

Published (*Prize Poem*) *Palestine*, 1803.

*Europe; or, Lines on the Present War*, 1809.

*Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India* (posthumous).

HENRY HART MILMAN, born 1791; died 1868.

Published Fazio, 1817.

The Fall of Jerusalem, 1820.

Belshazzar, 1822.

The Martyr of Antioch, 1822.

Anne Boleyn, 1826.

Samor, 1818.

History of Jews, History of Latin Christianity (see  
The Historians, vol. iii.)

BERNARD BARTON, born 1784; died 1849.

Published Poems, 1820.

EBENEZER ELLIOT, born 1781; died 1849.

JOHN CLARE, born 1793; died 1864.

Published Poems—Morning Walk, Evening Walk, etc., 1817.

Poems descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery, 1820

Village Minstrel, 1821.

ROBERT BLOOMFIELD, born 1766; died 1823.

Published Farmer's Boy, 1798.

Rural Tales, 1810.



THE LITERARY HISTORY  
OF ENGLAND

*This Edition is intended for circulation only in India  
and the British Colonies.*

Macmillan's Colonial Library

THE  
LITERARY HISTORY  
OF  
ENGLAND

IN THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH AND BEGINNING  
OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

BY MRS. OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF 'MAKERS OF FLORENCE,' ETC.

'Reading maketh a full man.'—BACON, *On Study*.

'A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.' MILTON, *Areopagitica*.

'Je ne voyage sans livres, ny en paix, ny en guerre. C'est la meilleure munition que j'aye trouvé à cet humain voyage.'—MONTAIGNE, *Livre iii. Chap. iii.*

'Books are the legacies that a great genius leaves to mankind.'—ADDISON, *Spectator*.

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# THE LITERARY HISTORY OF ENGLAND.

## CHAPTER I.

LONDON : THE UPPER CIRCLE : ROGERS—BYRON—  
MOORE.

It is Talfourd, we think, in his *Memorials of Charles Lamb*, who compared the cheerful whist parties in those little rooms high up among the housetops of the Temple, where the brother and sister held their homely court, with the much more ambitious home of the muses, in the gorgeous and stately retirement of Holland House. Nothing could more clearly exemplify the difference between London *bourgeois* and literary, and London fashionable, elegant, and lettered. The former is poor and homely, and familiar in all its circumstances—the other, brilliant in external aspect, much farther reaching in its associations, and full of that involuntary consciousness of being the very best and finest development of society, which is only kept from the height of arrogance by being involuntary, and with no possibility of doubt or argument about it. A glimmer of uncertainty as to whether they are really the great people they think themselves to be, will dash the confidence of the most self-sufficing circles on a lower level. The grand distinction of a society which is socially elevated as well as

mentally distinguished, is that the mere force of circumstances takes away all doubt upon the matter. However determinedly your man of letters may assert that he is Sir Oracle, the dogs will bark whatever he may say; but when he is a great potentate besides, these vulgar voices are hushed in awe, and nothing contradicts his conviction. It is true that there are audacious persons now-a-days to whom Holland House with all its grandeurs, and the bated breath with which the initiated once spoke of that abode of the gods, and the undisclosed anxiety with which they hoped to please its Juno and Jupiter, have an amusing, half-pathetic side—as showing at once the smallness of the finest shrine, and the pettiness of the most elevated humanity. The poorer and less important sphere, where outside circumstances are nothing, and where men are free to exhibit themselves and their characteristics in their own way, has all the advantage with posterity. We cannot get free of the splendid rooms, fine enough to have an art-history of their own like a mediæval city, nor even in a lesser way can we get free of Rogers's view over the park, his pictures and his luxuries. But there they stand, the other side of this world of literature, mingled with all the flutter of society, the gossip of lords and ladies, the scraps of politics, the secrets of antechambers, all that spray of social life, if we may use such an expression, which fills the air, and confuses the view. Something is gained, indeed, for wherever imperial interests are touched upon there is, at the worst, a *faux air* of enlargement and noble aim, and at the best, a real dignity which mere individualism rarely supplies; but at the same time there is something lost, for it is difficult to make the flattered members of that “best society” aware that the greater part of their enlightenment is merely gossip, and the knowledge of what is going on “behind the scenes,” on which they pride themselves, no more than the revelations of the back stairs.

Holland House, however, is unquestionably the most important and brilliant centre of literary society that we have known in England in recent days. It was the headquarters of a band of visitors on whom it conferred distinction, and who gave more distinction than they received. Naturally those who did not receive the flattering compliment of admission indemnified themselves by gibes and satirical assaults: while those who did, occasionally avenged the pricks and scorns to which they were subject under such a despotism, by after-revelations of discontent and rebellion. The master of the house was a man of some literary power and much accomplishment, whose modest hope expressed at the end of his life that, as "nephew of Fox and friend of Grey," he had cast no discredit on his position, conciliates the good opinion of posterity. But he was only a sort of good-natured god in this temple of the muses, often retired altogether from public view, veiled by illness, by gout and invalid habit from contact too close and general; while the ever active ruler of the community, familiar and imperious, a genial but sharp-tongued despot, exacting much worship, and spreading an atmosphere of awe around her, was Lady Holland, a woman who evidently added to the skill which could collect and manage the different elements of society, a great deal of that witty disregard for other people's feelings which keeps a little community in excitement and amusement, but leaves many a rankling recollection to come forth afterwards in bitter depreciation of the splendid reign and too autocratic rule. The mistress of a *salon*, who exclaims with serious concern, "What a pity! but couldn't you suppress it?" when one of her friends informs her he is about to publish a poem; who told Moore that his *Life of Sheridan* was a dull book, and interrupted Macaulay in his brilliant talk with, "Come, Macaulay, we have had enough of this," must have been a somewhat

alarming person. In most of the records of the society which she collected round her, a sense of her somewhat arrogant superiority, her careless treatment of the distinguished guests whose presence alone made her fine house more remarkable than other fine houses, is quite apparent. She treated them all with that mingling of admiration and contempt, condescension and flattery, which is so usual an attitude of the rich and great towards Art and its professors in general; but in her case, the bold sincerity of rudeness, the tantalising attractions of a caprice never to be calculated upon, and the charms of an unusually splendid and magnificent house, which it was a matter of pride to be connected with, made the guests endure, although it was impossible to prevent them from resenting. Macaulay has left the most graceful and benignant description of this great coterie, in magnanimous indifference to any of the snubs he received there. He was always fond of the idea of decadence and hoar antiquity falling upon the scenes with which he was acquainted; but Holland House still exists, defying all such gloomy imaginations.

“The time is coming when perhaps a few old men, the last survivors of our generation, will in vain seek among new streets and squares, and railway stations, for the site of that dwelling which was in their youth the favourite resort of wits and beauties, of painters and poets, of scholars, philosophers, and statesmen. They will then remember with strange tenderness many objects once familiar to them, the avenue and the terrace, the busts and the paintings, the carving, the grotesque gilding, the enigmatical mottoes. With peculiar fondness they will recall that venerable chamber, in which all the antique gravity of a college library was so singularly blended with all that female grace and wit could devise to embellish a drawing-room. They will recollect, not unmoved, those shelves laden with all the varied learning of many lands and many ages, and those portraits in which were preserved the features of the best and wisest Englishmen of two generations. They will recollect how many men who have guided the politics of Europe who have moved great assemblies by reason and eloquence,

who have put life into bronze and canvas, or who have left to posterity things so written as it shall not willingly let them die, were there mixed with all that was loveliest and gayest in the society of the most splendid of capitals. They will remember the peculiar character which belonged to that circle, in which every talent and accomplishment, every art and science, had its place. They will remember how the last debate was discussed in one corner, and the last comedy of Scribe in another; while Wilkie gazed with modest admiration at Sir Joshua's Baretto; while Mackintosh turned over Thomas Aquinas to verify a quotation; while Talleyrand related his conversations with Barras at the Luxembourg, or his ride with Lannes over the field of Austerlitz: they will remember above all the grace, the kindness far more admirable than grace with which the friendly hospitality of that ancient mansion was dispensed. They will remember the venerable and benignant countenance, and the cordial voice of him that bade them welcome."

This delightful description balances with stately eulogium the revelations of private letters and journals, which show in many cases a schoolboy sort of anxiety on the part of the illustrious guests as to whether my lady would be in a good humour, or Lord Holland's gout not too severe to permit him to be visible, and a certain sense that things might possibly turn out badly at any moment, and those stately rooms and brilliant assemblies be closed upon them for ever.

Of the names mentioned above, Mackintosh, one of the most remarkable members of the society, must be left to another chapter for an outline of his life and works. He was one of the foremost of the "Scotchmen" whom Byron in his ill-tempered verses declared to "feed," and of the "critics who carouse" at "the banquets spread at Holland House." All the members of the belligerent band of the *Edinburgh Review* were to be found there by right of their party, just as, in the same right, they were banished from so much in their own capital. There were now resident of them in London, in the beginning of the century, Henry Brougham, beginning with characteristic energy



and power his wonderful career, a man never popular, yet impressing his fellows with a perception of boundless force, vivacity, and power, such as we scarcely attribute now to the robust and restless Chancellor, who gained every prize that his profession and his country could give, and yet remained in some inexplicable way always an unsuccessful man; Francis Horner, one whose abilities we have in a great measure to take on trust from the panegyrics of his companions—for he did not live to give much proof in literature of the powers they saw in him: and Allen, whose post in the household of Lord Holland made him a sort of vizier of the brilliant despotism. Mackintosh, the mild and candid, had his balance in Hallam, a historian of a different mettle, whose judgment cannot be called mild. And Sydney Smith, with the “faun-like face,” which “was a sort of promise of a good thing when he does but open his lips,” lent his lighter wit to dispel the sometimes oppressive atmosphere, a man able to meet my lady on her own ground, and laughingly extract the sting from her impertinences. The coterie would not have been complete without a certain number of lesser members, poets of society and amateurs in literature, such as Henry Luttrell—a brilliant man about town, with the faculty of writing agreeable verses, of whom Rogers says that “none of the talkers I meet in London society can slide into a brilliant thing with such readiness as he does”—a quality which of itself was recommendation enough.

The representative of poetry in this brilliant company was, however, Rogers himself, the last, as he is somewhere called, of the old school, the only wealthy member of the confraternity living, a patron of literature, as well as practising the same, at once Mæcenas and poet. He had a *cortège* and following of his own, not indeed equal to the sublime and exclusive circle of Holland House, yet important and distinguished, and as the years went on, including

all that was greatest in poetry and letters. It was his ambition to surround himself with beautiful things, fine pictures and gifted people, and the company he collected at his table for nearly half a century was in its way the best in England. His poetry was not of such noble quality: but the *Pleasures of Memory*, which he published in 1792, had more than its meed of praise, and has not yet ceased to hold an active place as a gift-book and prize-book in handsome bindings, while its position as a poem which no library can be without, is permanent. In those days it was read devoutly by all who professed any love for poetry, and exalted by the critics far above the hotly contested productions of Wordsworth and Coleridge. And his other profession of banker, and his beautiful house, and his wealth, gave Rogers such a position as, alas, the greatest genius by itself will never confer. He was the friend, in his early days, of Mrs. Barbauld and Isaac Disraeli, two persons who might almost be taken to represent the opposite poles of literary society. He had little to do with the literary folk who lived at the other end of London and of life, though, when the great poets from the north came to town, there would be meetings in which Lamb, and sometimes even Godwin, were for the moment brought within his range; but to all writers who belonged ever so little to the great world, or had managed to get themselves introduced there, he gave his notice and hospitality, and sometimes help to the rising and unknown.

How it was that the little Irishman from Dublin, Tom Moore, who came across the Channel in the very end of the century with a few introductions and some translations from Anacreon in his pocket, scrambled into good society, it is somewhat difficult to make out. But he did so, and made himself the fashion, and got admission, he also, though not till some years later, into that heaven of Holland

script in the same vein, which he called "Hints from Horace," and was eager to publish, and a neglected bundle of Spenserian verses of which he thought nothing, but which turned out to be no less a thing than the first part of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. This young Lord Byron was twenty-three, and one of the most forlorn beings imaginable, though possessed of wonderful gifts of fortune—without friends or family, or a home, or anything to make up to him for the precocious and miserable knowledge of "life" in its worst aspect, which he had been so unfortunate as to acquire. His school and college friends were dead or estranged; relations he had scarcely any; his mother, for whom, so long as she lived, he had felt little affection, died immediately after his return from his wanderings; and his manner of life, before he set out upon these wanderings, had been such as to prejudice most of the people who knew him against him—indeed, this would seem to have been one of the objects of his uncomfortable, unlovely, and unenjoyed life, to make so much stir at least, that everybody should think as badly as possible of the hapless young reprobate. It was not a great ambition, but he would seem to have succeeded in it. When he took his seat in the House of Lords there was not a creature to stand by him, not another peer—and he loved peers—to give him the countenance which a young man needs. Unfortunate young Byron! He was proud, very conscious of his own rank, and eager for the deference it ought to have brought him. But the doors of society, which we are apt to think so very ready to open before such a young hero, remained obstinately closed in his case. He had nobody to introduce him, or teach him how to get the *entrée*, and he found the homage he loved only among servants and humble country folk. And being but a boy, and far from wise, he had made a little flourish of self-importance about his peerage in the little book that he

had innocently issued to a hard world. Jeffrey's review, after all, was nothing so very dreadful. Any graceful young lordling of the present day who should put forth his "Hours of Idleness" would get as hard or harder from the *Saturday Review*, and would in all likelihood bear it like a man without gratifying his critics by any outcry of pain or vengeance. But criticism was a new art in those days, and though no more ferocious (we think) than now, was much more keenly felt. And the *Edinburgh* had the art of planting wounds so that they should sting and burn. The reader must not suppose, however, that young Byron and his pretty little poems (for they were no more) had the honour of being the subject of such an elaborate article as those we now see in the great Reviews. Such small deer were not exposed to pursuit so lengthened. The *Review* in its earlier stages admitted articles of very varied extent, and that which the young poet so deeply resented was not longer than a literary newspaper would devote to a similar offender now.

But what an outburst of young passion and energy was in the reply! "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" is not a great poem. If it were possible to drop it out of Byron's life and works, we believe his lovers would always have been glad to do so, and he himself not the least contented; but it could not be dropped out of a literary history. Never was there a more remarkable example of "how it strikes a contemporary." \* It is always a matter of curiosity and interest to get at the opinion of youth, and to form an idea what the tendencies of the time are by the likings of its future masters—especially when these are the most highly endowed and educated of their day. Young Byron, indeed, was not of the latter class; his education was imperfect, his information desultory and chaotic, and his university had conveyed to him but a small share of those humanising

influences with which we are fondly apt to credit that seat of learning. But there was not such another literary genius in all the ranks of English youth, and he, if any one, should have seen and appreciated the nobler gifts, which had come to full development just as he reached that opening day in which everything that is beautiful in nature is most beautiful to the young seer. How strange is the difference between this high probability and the real state of affairs! The young Byron, the new poet, he who should have recognised by instinct his immortal brethren, vindicates above all things else the blindness of human intelligence, the obstinacy of prejudice, the old-fashionedness and conventionalism of youth. Nothing so artificial, so prejudiced, so blindly conservative could be, as the violent charge he makes in hot exasperation of vanity and injured *amour propre* against all who were before him in the lists of honour: all, or almost all, the exceptions being as edifying as the abuse. An indiscriminate assault upon all sorts and conditions of poets, Coleridge and Monk Lewis, Wordsworth and Grahame, all holding about the same place, apparently, in the young champion's eyes, is more remarkable than the rush at Jeffrey which was comprehensible and perhaps not illegitimate. Scott comes in for the most prolonged abuse of all, as "Apollo's venal son," as a "hireling bard" with a "prostituted muse," as one of the poets who "rack their brains for lucre not for fame." Then comes "ballad-mongering Southey," on whom he is scarcely so severe, though he means to be so, for indeed poor Southey, though he produced "annual strains" to take the field like armies, never was lucky enough to get half-a-crown a line. "Vulgar Wordsworth," whom the young avenger in all sincerity does not seem to think worth his steel, is described as "the meanest object of the lowly group," and his "verse of all but childish prattle void:" and Cole-

ridge "to turgid ode and tumid stanza dear," as "the laureate of the long-car'd kind;" while poor Mr. Cottle in Bristol, the gently garrulous bookseller, to whom we owe many pleasant reminiscences if we have all forgotten his poetry, comes in, in the absolute absence of all perspective, for rather more remark than either of these preceding poets. "Smug Sydney," "blundering Brougham," "paltry Pillans," are more naturally, as being Edinburgh reviewers, the object of this schoolboy vituperation. But at last the young man in the crowd he has raised about him falls in with some one whom he can praise. "Neglected genius! let me turn to you," he cries.

"Come forth, oh Campbell! give thy talents scope;  
Who dares aspire if thou must cease to hope?  
And thou, melodious Rogers! rise at last.  
Recall the pleasing memory of the past;  
Arise! let blest remembrance still inspire,  
And strike to wonted tones thy hallow'd lyre;  
Restore Apollo to his vacant throne,  
Assert thy country's honour and thine own.  
What! must deserted Poesy still weep  
Where her last hopes with pious Cowper sleep?

. . . . .  
No! though contempt hath mark'd the spurious brood,  
The race who rhyme from folly, or for food,  
Yet still some genuine sons 'tis hers to boast,  
Who, least affecting, still affect the most:  
Feel as they write, and write but as they feel—  
Bear witness Gifford, Sotheby, Macneil."

These illustrious names were the representatives, according to the young poet who was so soon to seize the very crown of rapid fame in England, of the poetry of his time. The last name will scarcely be known even to the most well-informed reader. Macneil was the author of "Scotland's Scaith," and the "Waes of War," of which we are told "ten thousand copies were sold in one month." It is about all that history has to say on his account.

The reader will smile to see what the poetic youth, fresh from Cambridge, and touched himself (though his genius was as yet undiscovered, either by himself or others) by the divine fire, thought of the poets of his time.

Curiously enough, however, it was to this assault upon his contemporaries that Byron owed his first introduction to the world of literature, and through it to society. It has been mentioned in a previous chapter that a duel of a somewhat ludicrous description took place between Jeffrey and the young poet Moore on the occasion of a severe review (these were days in which reviews were dangerous for the critics as well as for the authors) of the first volume of dubious verse, which he published under the name of Little. This absurd incident exactly suited Byron's purpose. He brings in with delighted malice

"That ever glorious, almost fatal fray,  
When Little's leadless pistol met his eye,  
And Bow Street myrmidons stood laughing by."

Moore, however, who had published an accurate account of the transaction, exonerating himself from the ridicule of the "leadless pistol," considered Byron's allusion to it as directly giving him the lie, and being as Irish and as warlike as ever, wrote a sort of challenge to the new assailant, which, however, never reached Byron till a year later, when the little Irishman was married and had cooled down. Several letters followed, and Moore was glad to accept the explanation that Byron had never seen his published denial of the more ludicrous part of the circumstances, and not unwilling to meet and make friends with the young man who had proved himself at least a dangerous enemy, and who was a lord and a wonder besides. On receiving Byron's letter proposing a friendly, not a hostile meeting, "I went instantly," he says, "to my friend Mr. Rogers and informed him of the correspondence in which I had been engaged. With his usual readiness

to oblige and serve, he proposed that the meeting between Lord Byron and myself should take place at his table, and requested of me to convey to the noble lord his wish." The invitation was immediately accepted. It was intended at first that Rogers and Moore alone should form the party, "but Mr. Thomas Campbell, having called upon our host that morning, was invited to join it." It is easy to imagine the curiosity and interest with which these three awaited the altogether unknown and remarkable young stranger. The two elder men had been specially distinguished by his praises, and little Moore, though laughed at, had been far more leniently treated than his betters.

"---Little ; young Catullus of his day,  
As sweet, but as immoral in his lay!"

was such a shaft as made no very serious wound. Lords were familiar to Rogers, and probably not exciting ; but yet rank adds an attraction the more to all other qualities, and a noble poet is piquant and picturesque ; whereas the other two *convives* were of a humble position, and could scarcely fail to be dazzled by the title of the new brother, who had it in his power to be so potent a friend or enemy. And already many stories had been told of this wild and wandering spirit ; youthful orgies at Newstead exaggerated into something portentous, and adventures innumerable, by sea and land, all contributed to rouse the expectations of the poets, who waited for the opening of the door and the announcement of the novel, the terrible, the delightful guest. He came, and Moore, for one, was enchanted with everything about him—"the nobleness of his air, his beauty, the gentleness of his voice and manners, and—what was naturally not the least attraction—his kindness to myself." "Being in mourning for his mother, the colour, as well of his dress as of his glossy, curling, and picturesque hair, gave more effect to the pure, spiritual



paleness of his features, in the expression of which, as he spoke, there was a perpetual play of lively thought, though melancholy was their habitual character when in repose." Altogether, it was a hero of romance who thus burst upon the vision of the assembled poets—good Campbell, fresh from his respectable, middle-class, suburban cottage; Moore, out of his economical retirement; middle-aged Rogers, who from another point of view could scarcely fail to be dazzled too by the youth and limitless future which lay before his young guest. It was a little embarrassing that there was nothing for him to eat, for the young poet, afraid of getting fat,—a very natural if somewhat absurd fear,—lived upon vegetables; and "biscuits and soda water," for which he asked, were not to be had. "He professed, however," says Moore, "to be equally well pleased with potatoes and vinegar, and of these meagre materials contrived to make rather a hearty dinner." Barring this whimsical difficulty, the meeting was very successful, and Moore continued Byron's devoted liegeman for the rest of his life.

This is the first glimpse we have of the poet in any thing that can be called or imagined the society of his peers. He had as a boy been received at one or two houses of his kinsfolk, in one of which he formed a romantic and premature attachment, which certainly was the inspiration of several poems, and which is romantically supposed to have helped to overshadow his life. The terrible want of that life was, it is evident, something to fix him in his orbit, some ties of home or duty, some sense of responsibility, anything that would have freed him from the restlessness that consumed his soul, and which no excitement satisfied. The air of hurry and breathless reposeless movement which is about him during this early period, when as yet there was no fatal step taken, or irrecoverable mistake made, is very remark-

able. His letters, which in our opinion are never very attractive, have an air of haste for which there could be no necessity save in his nature. Everything is mentioned in the curtest manner, not a pause, not an indication of interest beyond the most cursory and trifling. His friends, his occupations, the (fine) people he meets, the news of the time, all come in hurriedly to the breathless record. Few glimmers of genius, and not even much that could be called human individuality, the features that mark one man from another, are to be found in these productions. His biographer gives them at full length, and it has again become a fashion in the present renaissance of Byron's fame to applaud those hasty chapters of his experiences: but we cannot find them worthy of any serious remark. They are the kind of letters which any undistinguished young man, with coarsish tastes, and time entirely occupied with the frivolous occurrences of the day, might have written: nor, if he had not turned out to be Byron, would any one have supposed them worth the dignity of print.

He was very lonely, Moore tells us. The humble little poet would come and dine with his noble friend at a tavern when he could escape from the more important people who invited him to their houses. Only Mr. Dallas, who was a connection, and whom Byron trusted with the management of his literary business, and his solicitor, knew him in all that world of London, where a young man of his rank has generally such hosts of friends. Galt, whom he had met on his travels, is the only man of any kind of reputation who speaks of him at this dim portion of his career; and Galt was nothing more than a half-ruined adventurer in these days. Even the "coffee-house companions," who had given him an undesirable society on his first appearance in town, had dispersed and fallen away, as it is the way of loose company to do.

And it is impossible to imagine a more forlorn figure than that of this noble, handsome, gifted, young man, wandering about from one poor tavern to another, now and then rescuing an evening from the dreary inane around by the note, "I dine with Rogers to-morrow," knowing nobody, caring for nobody, with neither hope to inspire nor duty to fix him to any spot or any occupation on earth. It is extraordinary to realise such a position. He had done nothing worse than hundreds of other careless young men—nothing that could make a Pariah of him or shut him out from friendship and kindness at so early an age. And there does not indeed seem to have been any inclination on the part of society to reject him. He was forgiven with wonderful readiness for his general abuse of the literary profession. Lord Holland interposed his friendly offices to give him information on a subject on which he meant to speak in the House of Lords, notwithstanding that both his wife and himself had been visited with the young poet's utmost scorn. In short, there seems to have been absolutely no reason for his entire isolation; and yet it existed. When he made that first speech and appearance in the House of Lords (on behalf of the poor rioters in his own county—a very good object), he describes himself with his usual curious ostentation as "a person in some degree connected with the suffering county, though a stranger not only to the House in general, but to almost every individual whose attention I presume to solicit." And yet he had been educated at Harrow and Cambridge. The fact is so strange that it seems impossible to credit it; poverty, which is sometimes represented as the cause, scarcely seems a sufficient one; and the explanation to which we are driven is the painful one that the company of his own class was really not agreeable to Byron. He had accustomed himself to a reedom and self-indulgence incompatible with the re-

straints of society. It is easier for the lawless mind to "get on" in a tavern than in a drawing-room. What other elucidation of the mystery can we find or suggest?

Perhaps this speech about the Nottingham stocking weavers was an attempt to find an entrance into a better sphere. The applause with which it was received seems to have given this fortunate-unfortunate the highest gratification. His friend, Mr. Dallas, who met him directly after its delivery, found him "glowing with success and much agitated." He had been told that Sheridan thought he would make a great orator, and Lord Holland and Lord Granville paid him "high compliments" in their speeches in the same debate. "Lord H. tells me I shall beat them all if I persevere, and Lord G. remarked that the construction of some of my periods is very like Burke's," he says in a letter to Hodgson. It was the first social success of his life, and soothed and stilled the uneasy sense he seems always to have had of not really belonging to the sphere of which, even while seeming to despise it, he had such an exalted opinion. But it was not to be to his oratory that he owed his admission into society. Two days after this hopeful speech the young poet delivered his real credentials to the world. He had brought with him from his travels, as has been said, two manuscripts, one which he looked upon with complacency, and was hot to publish—a satire after Horace, a reminiscence at once of his previous spites against society and the critics, and of that youthful classicism which it is the object of the schools to foster; and another, a miscellaneous bundle of verses, written apparently on the pressure of the moment, and mingled with fugitive poems of all descriptions, which he took "from a small trunk," and felt were not "worth troubling" his friend with. Mr. Dallas, fortunately, was a better critic than Lord Byron; and he it was whose insistence brought into the world

the poem which was to found a new school of poetry, and influence the public mind, at least for the time, as no other poem of the generation did. That he himself had no sort of notion of this is evident from the very flutter of delight and gratified vanity with which on the edge of a success so much greater he speaks of this speech of his in the House of Lords. Two days after *Childe Harold* appeared. It is not too much to say that the public mind was moved by it to a sort of sudden ecstacy of interest such as is almost incredible in our calmer days. "I awoke one morning and found myself famous," he says. The first edition was sold out at once, and a universal ferment of interest about the young author flew through that society which up to this time had known and cared nothing about him.

"At his door," his biographer tells us, "most of the leading names of the day presented themselves,—some of them persons whom he had much wronged in his Satire, but who now forgot their resentment in generous admiration. From morning till night the most flattering testimonies of his success crowded his table—from the grave tributes of the statesman and the philosopher down to (what flattered him still more) the romantic billet of some incognita, or the pressing note of invitation from some fair leader of fashion; and in place of the desert which London had been to him but a few weeks before, he now not only saw the whole splendid interior of high life thrown open to receive him, but found himself among its illustrious crowds the most distinguished object."

It is seldom that genuine poetical fame, that fame which is to last, and become an inheritance for the very land that produced it, arises so suddenly. Scott, with his easy, fresh, delightful *Lay*, rose almost as soon into the heaven of popular applause; but his can scarcely be called a genuine poetical fame; and Byron's, rapid as it was, was also complete and lasting—a fame which, as yet, though subject to the revisal of two or three generations, has not been diminished, though it has had

fluctuations like all things human. In many ways this instantaneous leap into the highest places of success was extraordinary. But for the introduction of the traveller in the beginning of the poem, the *Pilgrimage* was almost entirely descriptive of scenes unfamiliar to the English reader, who had not then become the cosmopolitan wanderer he now is, and whom wars and tumults had for long shut out from the Continent. And it was written in elaborate verse, which, however melodious, is always a tax, more or less, on the faculties of the reader. When we open *Childe Harold* now, we turn instinctively to the later cantos,—those which reflect the turning point of the poet's life,—and in which there is all the excitement of real calamity and suffering. But no such catastrophe had befallen the young Byron when he set out upon his travels, and the poem in which he embodied his experiences, and which he did not think “worth the while” even of his indulgent friend and critic, was, in reality, little more than an itinerary, though of the most splendid kind. How it was that the serious sweetness of those long stanzas which celebrated nothing more moving than the praises of “august Athena,” or “stern Albania's hills,” should have produced so great a commotion at once in society, and among the general world of readers, is difficult to understand. Greater poems have had very much less effect, and yet have been well received;—this attained in a moment the universal attention, and dazzled all who beheld it,—springing suddenly like a comet out of the vapours.

It is difficult, we have said, to understand this instantaneous fame; but, indeed, it is evident enough upon what it was founded. The secret of its power was in the hero who traversed vaguely those classic countries, giving a certain mystery and interest even to scenes in which his figure was imagined rather than seen—and in

the revelation of him which occupied the beginning of the poem: a brief effective sketch, original and captivating to the popular imagination, which never in English literature had met with anything like this embodiment of youthful tragedy before. René had preceded him in France, and Werter in Germany, but *Childe Harold* was different from both. He was the symbol less of revolt against established laws than of that personal grievance which is felt so bitterly in youth, when things do not go as we wish. Not the loss of a Lotte or a Mary, but wild despite at his own insignificance, a fierce disgust with the world which did not do him homage, nor cared very deeply whither he went or came, was in every line of the picture. It is a picture of youth awakening from its first wild burst of enjoyment and confidence in itself, to the bitter sense that its pleasures are naught, and itself of no particular importance in the economy of the Universe. The pang with which he gazes wildly round to see the indifference of gods and men to his weal or inclination, the calm routine which goes on unmoved, howsoever the young hero may suffer and even if he sinks altogether in his struggle to have everything and enjoy everything, is, in its astonishment, its fury, its pathos of self-pity, a very real pang; and the force of tragic superiority to the cruel world and all its ways, even the pretence of having earned that world's anathema by guilt as mysterious as the suffering, is comprehensible enough to the heart, a natural refuge for pride deeply wounded and mortified feeling. But the image was new to the age, and affected it in a powerful way. It was the first time this young misanthrope, this mysterious cynic, this proud and scornful rebel, sufferer, and outcast, had been put in bodily shape before the world. And its attraction was increased by the fact that, amid all its truth to nature, there was a subtle half-conscious fiction running through

every line. No despair could have been so black and profound that did not conceal a secret consciousness of unlimited hope behind, and the very grandeur with which that sublime melodramatic figure averted his eyes from all delights, made it more certain that, when he chose to "take a thought and mend," all these delights were yet well within his reach. Thus the mingling of the fictitious and the real, the sincerity and good faith of present passion with all the casuistry and artifice of fictitious sentiment, gave an additional attraction. The guilt, and grandeur, and hopeless misery were all alike sham, yet the feeling was true: and this artificial character, if we may be permitted to employ a paradox, made the conception more real, and helped, as nothing else could, to express the strange chaos of wilfulness and waywardness, of suffering and satisfaction, the complacent masquerading and genuine misery which are involved in the first tragedy of youth.

This publication changed life and the world to Byron. It was in February 1812 that it took place, and all doors were thrown open to him. In 1815 he married. In 1816, a year after, he left England, separated from his wife, a broken man, with neither hope nor possibility left him, so far as appeared, of ever making up with the world or presenting himself again in society. Thus his entire career in England was limited to four years, beginning in total obscurity and ending in general reprobation. As it is almost incredible that a young man of his rank, not to speak of his genius—for that was at the time unrevealed—should have been so friendless and forlorn to start with, so it is hard to understand his entire abandonment afterwards. He was not without partisans to offer pleas in his favour, and breathe for him all the commonplace and well-worn excuses which are supposed to account for the follies of genius. But the general



impression was as entirely against him as ever public opinion was ; and this brief space of unbounded applause, and equally boundless disapprobation, represented all his life in England, the entire cycle of his rising and falling. A more extraordinary career could not have been imagined. The violent onslaught which, while still utterly unknown, he had made upon almost every famous individual of his contemporaries, had been generously and fully forgiven to the author of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, with a magnanimity which, so far as we know, is quite unrivalled in history. The most royal pardon had been granted to him with acclamation, and the fairest chance a man could have, fully accorded. Society, which had been coldly unconscious of his existence, opened its doors wide to the young poet who had so many claims on its consideration. Without entering in a manner totally inconsistent with our purpose into the scandalous chronicles of the time, which was as unlovely a moment as can be found in social history, we cannot give the reader any account of the life of Byron in this brief epitome of his existence. It was a lawless life, bound by no rule of principle, full, it is to be supposed, of enjoyment, full of remorse, of pecuniary miseries and wild expenditure, of passions and separations, all headlong, unregulated, prodigal. In no way is the picture of the young poet an attractive one. Moore says everything for him that a counsel retained for the defence could say, but never is able, evidently, to divest himself of the sense that his client has a very poor case, and that in reality there is very little to be said. His own letters and journals seem to us superficial in the highest degree, and give little idea of anything but the froth of a restless nature. They are a mere record of events, and full of the hurry-scurry of society, the chatter of a noisy circle in which there is nothing great but the names that appear and reappear, but show little of either

thought or feeling above the level of a frivolous young man of fashion. We are unaccustomed in these days to the discretion which casts out everything purely personal, and hides under asterisks every allusion that might wound or grieve, and it is difficult in the face of the damaging revelations which of late have soiled some great memories, to object to the reticence which, by this time, to readers unacquainted with contemporary talk and scribblings, envelops the whole question of Byron's life and relations before his marriage in a mist. It seems doubtful which is best, and whether entire silence would not be better than either indecent candour or tantalising concealments.

This at least we know, that Byron lived a life capable, perhaps, of excuse, but not of justification; that after having dissipated the ordinary prospects of existence on that high level, he had another chance in marriage—and somehow, more dolorously, more shamefully still, failed in that also, and so far as England was concerned in life altogether. There are times in which concealment is the worst injury that can be done a man, as there are also cases in which disclosure is a crime. We are incapable of saying in which category Byron's story is to be placed. His wife is one of the greatest mysteries of recent times. Admired and almost worshipped by an adoring circle for the greater part of her life, she was at the crisis of her story regarded with fierce indignation by her husband's partisans, and at the end of her life sank into something like the contempt, as well as execration, of the greater part of the public. The world will never know the rights—or wrongs—of the question. The woman in the end has had the worst of it, as women generally have in such a conflict. In some particulars there can be no doubt she was brutally treated, but her incapacity for carrying a secret long guarded to the grave with her, has done more harm to her memory than if she had told that secret at

the moment, supposing it to be true ; if it is all an invention, then words cannot express the wickedness of the deed. One moral of the whole miserable story would seem to be that candour about every event, while the parties are alive to defend themselves, is after all the best, since it seems beyond the range of human faculties to keep silence for ever, and some blabber, sooner or later, is sure to let the most unsavoury revelation out.

During these four years which comprise his life in England, the young poet, in the midst of all his loves, his frivolities, and his embarrassments, produced a succession of poems, written with the greatest rapidity, and with a total absence of the study or retirement hitherto thought necessary for such composition. In the heart of London society and a hundred intrigues, he managed to pour forth canto after canto and couplet after couplet, glowing and hot from a heart which he did his best to represent as worn out, misanthropical, and disgusted with the world. The *Giaour*, the *Bride of Abydos*, the *Corsair*, *Lara*, the *Siege of Corinth*, and *Parisina*, were all the product of this time. They raised the reputation he had gained into an overwhelming flood of praise and admiration. They are all Eastern in subject, and all penetrated, more or less, by the same character which had enchanted the world in the first sketch of *Harold*. The *Giaour* indeed, is too fragmentary to afford any clear view of character at all ; and the *Bride of Abydos* has a virtuous and excellent youth for its hero ; but these are the only exceptions. The *Corsair* and *Lara* out-Harolded Harold, and fixed upon the public mind the lineaments of that mysterious personage, gloomy and grand, wrapped in his cloak, and self-separated from all the world, with dark brow and darker shadow, awing the Universe—a being abstracted from any human connection save one. So far the *Corsair* improved upon

the *Childe*. He had one love which linked him to humanity. But, whereas Childe Harold was guilty of nothing but dissipation, Conrad was a pirate chief, familiar with blood and crime, and Lara under some still deeper, shameful stigma, which it was worth his while to hush up by murder. These were the heroes whom the new poet introduced to the world; and while one half of the critics were admiringly shocked by his majestic criminals, the other half were delightfully stimulated by this new conception of the sublime. The idea that he himself was the model from whom he drew, increased the feeling on both sides, and between the people who were shocked and those who were pleasingly startled into a new sensation, his fame swelled higher than ever fame had swelled before. He did not himself at all discourage the idea that his subject was himself. "He told me an odd report—that I am the actual Conrad, the veritable Corsair, and that part of my travels are supposed to have passed in piracy. Alas! people sometimes hit near the truth, but never the whole truth," Byron says, with a smile of complacency one can imagine about his mouth—"Wrote to \* \* the 'Corsair' report," he says, in another place, "she says she don't wonder, since 'Conrad is so *like*.' It is odd that one who knows me so thoroughly should tell me this to my face. However, if she don't know, nobody can." Thus he adopted the popular fancy, not without pleasure, and the identification of poet and hero added indefinitely to the effect, and raised his fame higher and higher. The poems were read eagerly to throw more light upon the man; the man's antecedents, and all the gossip that could be collected about him, were studied and talked of, in order to add a little to the revelations of the poem. The poetry was fine—and it was scandal at the same time: what society could resist two charms so potent, mingled so skilfully and so well?

But to find any special human features now in this melodramatic type is an achievement beyond our powers. Harold, upon the deck of his ship, looking back bitterly upon the land in which he has wasted his youth and his chances, pretending to scorn, yet in reality keenly affected by the circumstances of his self-banishment—has a certain amount of humanity in him, and might very naturally be supposed to reflect the being of his creator; but the Corsair, though he may be but the same impersonation heightened and wrapped in stage clothes and draperies still more gloomy, has lost all individual features, and is a mere symbol of the conventional sublime.

“That man of loneliness and mystery,  
 Scarce seen to smile, and seldom heard to sigh;  
 Whose name appals the fiercest of his crew,  
 And tints each swarthy cheek with sallow hue;  
 Still sways their souls with that commanding art  
 That dazzles, leads, yet chills the vulgar heart.

But who that Chief? his name on every shore  
 Is famed and fear'd—they ask and know no more.  
 With these he mingles not but to command;  
 Few are his words, but keen his eye and hand.  
 Ne'er seasons he with mirth their jovial mess,  
 But they forgive his silence for success.  
 Ne'er for his lip the purpling cup they fill,  
 That goblet passes him untasted still.  
 And for his fare—the rudest of his crew  
 Would that, in turn, have pass'd untasted too;  
 \* Earth's coarsest bread, the garden's homeliest roots,  
 And scarce the summer luxury of fruits,  
 His short repast in humbleness supply  
 With all a hermit's board would scarce deny.

Thus prompt his accents and his actions still,  
 And all obey and few inquire his will;  
 To such, brief answer and contemptuous eye  
 Convey reproof, nor further deign reply.”

And here is Lara, who is popularly supposed to be the

Corsair grown older, and returned out of his wild career into the paternal halls, where his fierce and troublous life of adventures is unknown :—

“That brow in furrow’d lines had fix’d at last,  
And spake of passions, but of passion past :  
The pride, but not the fire, of early days,  
Coldness of mien, and carelessness of praise ;  
A high demeanour, and a glance that took  
Their thoughts from others by a single look ;  
And that sarcastic levity of tongue,  
The stinging of a heart the world had stung,  
That darts in seeming playfulness around,  
And makes those feel that will not own the wound ;  
All these seem’d his, and something more beneath  
Than glance could well reveal, or accent breathe.  
Ambition, glory, love, the common aim,  
That some can conquer, and that all would claim,  
Within his breast appear’d no more to strive,  
Yet seem’d as lately they had been alive ;  
And some deep feeling it were vain to trace  
At moments lighten’d o’er his livid face.

Around him some mysterious circle thrown  
Repell'd approach, and show'd him still alone ;  
Upon his eye sat something of reproof,  
That kept at least frivolity aloof ;  
And things more timid that beheld him near,  
In silence gazed, or whisper'd mutual fear."

To assert that any human being, with individual habits of his own, is "so *like*" this conjunction of abstract qualities is as curious as any other particular of the history. There was indeed one point in which Byron distinctly resembled the Corsair, but that was not a point of character. The poet, like his hero, ate "earth's coarsest bread, the garden's homeliest roots," and little or nothing more; but this was from a most unpoetical reason; and could we imagine that Conrad, like Byron, used this regimen in order that he might not grow fat, the finest poetry would not save him from that ridicule which is

death to sentiment. All, or almost all, the enchantment which once surrounded the hero has vanished, and a profaner public smiles at the gloomy grandeur and self-absorbed conscious sublimity of this mysteriously guilty personage, who, under pretence of concealing his remorse and despairs, wears them conspicuously as his livery. But the sincerity of the poet himself in setting forth so theatrical a figure, his genuine admiration of it, and inability to perceive any possibilities of ridicule, is proved by the constant repetition, in tale after tale, of the same wonderful creation, sardonic, mysterious, and grandly superior to the crowd. Byron, it is evident, was never himself weary of the one type of being which he had evolved. It satisfied his vanity, which was great, and his imagination, which, notwithstanding his great genius, was not great, but limited and somewhat formal, if we might even dare to say vulgar, delighting in strong effects, and indifferent to the more delicate gradations of nature. The other personages in these early works are entirely vague, indistinguishable, mere names and little more. But his generation received every *replica* with acclamation. They were transported by the sombre charm of those dark looks and tragic gestures. Not even the critics reproached the poet with the monotony of his central figure. In the full illumination of the nineteenth century the sham-heroic pirate chief was to them as a revelation from heaven.

This is, perhaps, the most wonderful evidence ever given to the force, and beauty, and intense vitality of a literary medium. These are not the words we would naturally employ to describe the divine stream of great poetry; for even the poetry of Byron's tales is not of a divine kind. It is full of splendour, and strength, and brilliant adaptation to the subject. The impression of mingled force and smoothness in it is admirable; but

it is not the highest strain of poetry; it is a fine and powerful literary vehicle, brilliant, effective, and forcible. Glancing over these tales, after a long interval, the reader will be surprised to find how few passages in them have fallen into universal use. That triumphant criticism of the simple-minded which pointed out that Hamlet was nothing but a mass of quotations, could never be applied to the *Corsair* or his peers. The beautiful passage in the *Giaour* beginning—

“He who hath bent him o’er the dead,  
E’er the first day of death is fled,”

is one of the few exceptions. But though it seldom reached the point at which verse thus falls into the popular heart, it was so full of force and harmonious movement, so living in every line, so rapid in narrative, so intense in sentiment, that the monotony of the one oft-repeated impersonation was not only forgiven but delighted in. In such a case reproduction is either a weariness or an additional and cumulative charm. In pure fiction of the higher class, it is one of the greatest pleasures of the reader to meet again in one story with the friends he has acquired in another; but poetry has seldom permitted such a repetition. Here, however, the license was fully awarded. It gave the world a thrill of pleasure to re-find the wandering and weary Harold, with his bitter smile intensified, and his disgust with men and life accounted for, in the guilty, and gloomy, and mysterious Corsair, the hero of “one virtue and a thousand crimes;” and then once more to trace him in *Lara* with gloom ever deepening, and mystery ever increasing, the dark and proud chieftain, full of secret remorse, yet unconquerable—confronting gods and men with haughty defiance. And these were all Byron! and nobody of his generation had swept onward in such a resistless current



of song. Scott, indeed, had led the way in this fashion of poetry, but Scott's fresh fountain of verse was greatly inferior in passion to the fervid strains of his young competitor. There is a comparison made by Byron himself of a passage of his *Parisina* with a passage in *Marmion*, which makes this wonderfully clear. "I fear there is a resemblance," he says, "though I never thought of it before, and could hardly wish to imitate that which is inimitable." The passages in question are descriptions of the guilty heroines of the two tales—*Parisina* and *Constance*—at the crisis of their fate. We give that of *Marmion* first:—

"Her look composed, and steady eye,  
Bespoke a matchless constancy ;  
And there she stood, so calm and pale,  
That, but her breathing did not fail,  
And motion slight of eye and head,  
And of her bosom, warranted  
That neither sense nor pulse she lacks,  
You might have thought a form of wax  
Wrought to the very life was there ;  
So still she was, so pale, so fair."

This is *Constance* on her trial—the betrayed and betraying maiden—victim and instrument of wickedness—on the verge of a doom which destroys her alone. The other is *Parisina*, more, yet less, sinful—contemplating, not her own, but her lover's fate:—

"She stood, I said, all pale and still,  
The living cause of Hugo's ill ;  
Her eyes unmoved, but full and wide,  
Not once had turn'd to either side—  
Nor once did these sweet eyelids close,  
Or shade the glance o'er which they rose,  
But round their orbs of deepest blue  
The circling white dilated grew—  
And there with glassy gaze she stood,  
As ice were in her curdled blood."

Nothing could better show the range of the two poets. Scott's picture is pathetic, and moves the reader with a sentiment of tenderness and pity, such as the sufferings of innocence, rather than guilt, should call forth. Constance appears to us as a victim—almost a martyr; but in Byron's companion sketch, the half-stupefied yet all-conscious stillness of doom, the awe, the anguish, the horror, affect us with something of the same overwhelming cessation of thought and sense as has befallen the miserable, beautiful creature, standing dumb, in agony ineffable, to see destruction overtake the sharer of her sin. The very background glows with a pale flame of passion behind her head, and those wide-opened, motionless eyes. Constance breathes and moves, but Parisina's whole being is arrested like a frozen stream.

Another characteristic which helped to secure Byron's instantaneous triumph was one which we have already noted in respect to Scott—his intelligibility—the entire absence of the mystic in him. None of those gleams of secret insight into the depths of nature which fill with enthusiasm the sympathetic and understanding, but confuse the crowd, ever flash from the genius of Byron. The mysteries with which he deals are purely material, capable of explanation, and affording an easy exercise to the fancy in making them out. This is one of the greatest and most marked distinctions between one class of poetry and another. When we introduce a simple intelligence, say that of a child or an entirely uneducated person, to the wonders and glories of song, there must always be a great deal at which the untrained intelligence will make momentary pause, perplexed by something which has not occurred in the phraseology and thoughts of every day. Who could explain the *Ancient Mariner*? The soul divines, and he that hath an ear to hear, hears—and understands: but Scott and Byron, the one in a

tame, the other in a grander sense, are both cheerfully intelligible, explainable, making no impossible demand on the faculties of the reader. Nothing could be more mysterious than the *Corsair*, but we can hold our breath and guess at those secrets of his with much of the satisfaction which accompanies our ordinary researches into the secrets of our neighbours. There is nothing in them which reaches that region beyond sight, that darkness round us and within, which it is the highest function of the poet to divine, the highest exercise of the mind to search into, catching such glimpses as our faculties will allow. On this, Byron has no communication to make, no light to offer. He is as profane and ignorant as any one of us. When he himself risks a wondering question before these dark portals, it is with that despairing levity which is the resource of those who fear and know nothing, not of those who love and ponder and by moments see. There is no kindred with the mystic and unknown in the range of his genius; he belongs entirely to the solid earth, and his mysteries are those of the theatre and the tale, nothing greater or more.

We need not enter farther into the incidents which caused his departure from London and the entire breaking up of his life. With these the world would have had little to do at the time had he not taken it into his confidence: but at this distance, when both the chief actors are dead, the story is one which is open to the discussion of all, and cannot be ignored. Domestic convulsions, even when they reach the height of tragedy, can scarcely be without many petty elements. Byron's *Farewell* to his wife, which was in everybody's mouth at the time, is a piece of sentimental comedy added on to, and making a pitiful commentary upon, the really tragical crisis which made England and reasonable existence impossible to him thenceforward. That he should have arrived at so

terrible a turning point, and, ruined in fortune, bankrupt in reputation, doubted by all and condemned by most of his contemporaries, should have celebrated the conclusion of this tragic episode of life in a strain so commonplace and unreal is as extraordinary as any other of the confusing events of that extraordinary moment. He who took up the interrupted song of *Childe Harold* with so much genuine feeling, how did he, how could he, interpose the sentimental and theatrical *romanza* of an offended *primo tenore* between himself and human sympathy? We are told that the manuscript was blurred with his tears, and that there is every reason to suppose him to have been in earnest in the superficial pathos of his appeal to the wife whom he never seems even to have pretended to love—a fact which makes the confusion all the greater, since it is difficult to imagine any serious emotion expressing itself in such verses. But Byron's imagination was, as we have said, much inferior to his genius, and he wanted both good taste and that critical discrimination which has so much to do with personal dignity as well as with excellence in art. He could not divine how such an effusion would be regarded by his contemporaries, and was not even aware of its unreality until, with an angry illumination afterwards, he discovered the folly of it and perceived too late, through other people's eyes, what he had failed to perceive with his own. But, indeed, the interested reader will hail with a certain relief this crisis in Byron's career. His after life was wild and reckless enough, but it was not so miserable as the forced and fictitious life in London, where ruin lurked at every corner, and the semblance of prosperity and happiness was scarcely skin-deep. It ended in an inevitable explosion, all the elements having worked towards this since the wedding-day on which he had called his new-made wife Miss Milbanke with an absence

of mind almost incredible in a young bridegroom. When we read the journal, so full of fictitious liveliness, yet pain, so matter-of-fact, so commonplace, so angry and wretched, with still the same record of trivial things and talk, warped and made miserable by splenetic and reckless sentiment, and the chaos of an unregulated soul, it is with actual satisfaction that we see the end come. When the smoke and ashes clear off, and the passionate pilgrim storms away again over land and sea, leaving the failure and the misery behind him, our minds are eased from a painful burden. The gates of society may be closed against him, but again there seems a chance for him in the wider world.

## CHAPTER II.

## BYRON—SHELLEY.

WHEN Byron was reaching the stormy climax of his career in London, another poet, younger in years, whose beginning in life had been almost as wayward and unfortunate, though far less guilty, had appeared and disappeared again, not in the brilliant illumination of society, but among the struggling makers of literature in the other end of London. Percy Bysshe Shelley was born, more like a fairy changeling than an ordinary British infant, in a handsome country house in England in 1792, when Byron was but four years old in Aberdeen. The family of the younger child of genius belonged to that rural aristocracy which has produced many men of note and a great deal of respectable stupidity, but few poets; and from the beginning of his life he seems to have been out of tune with everything about him. His father, his family, and surroundings, were as opposite to him in character, hopes, and prejudices, as it is possible to conceive. Where it was that the respectable squire's son imbibed the ideas which dominated his life there seems no record; but he was a revolutionary born, a freethinker from his cradle, atheistical and democratical, in everything going contrary to all the traditions of his race, of which he was the heir and representative by a strange irony of fortune, a position which made steady-going

orthodoxy and conservatism almost necessities of existence. Young Shelley's rebellion against all that was, seems to have pervaded everything else that is known of him. By the time he went to Eton, if we may credit his own record, he had already come to recognise, in the hum of voices proceeding from the schoolroom, "the harsh and grating strife of tyrants and of foes," and to find in every little fret of schoolboy life marks of the chains in which free-born nature was bound. The small oppressions of fagging, the little round of punishment and obligation, were in his eyes evils large enough to fill the soul with bitterness :

" Nothing that my tyrants knew or thought  
I cared to learn,"

he says, with a sentiment not indeed uncommon with boyhood, but differing much from the schoolboy's usual light-hearted perversity. There was not a laugh in him throughout his life, nor had his hot young enthusiasm any conception of the happy calm of ordinary youth. His young life is a record of strife and resistance ; but it is so wildly dreamy and mystical, and the facts all through are so confused with fictions and heated interpretations of the real, that it is hard to know what to receive and what to reject. He believed himself to have been expelled from Eton ; but there does not seem the slightest evidence that such an event took place. At Oxford, however, it did occur ; he was sent away from University College on account of a pamphlet called *The Necessity of Atheism*, which he considered it his duty not only to publish, but to send, with serious intentions of instructing them, to the heads of his College. One of his biographers speaks of this as a mere boyish freak ; but another treats it with much grandeur, declaring that " Percy Shelley had as good a right to form and expound his opinions on theology as

the Archbishop of Canterbury," an assertion <sup>side</sup> appalling to all who have the charge of persons of <sup>side</sup> nineteen, an age at which no Archbishop ever promulgated doctrine. Thus one more youth of genius was cast out of her bosom by the University, that *Alma Mater* who has so little kindness for the poets. Young Shelley ran wild after this severance of all legitimate bonds. His father was angry, and made that feint of casting him off in which bewildered and angry fathers so often take refuge, and he was left to his own foolish devices at this momentous moment of his life. His sisters, who were soft-hearted and anxious to help him, sent him aid by the hands of a schoolfellow, a foolish romantic girl, who by a series of accidents was thrown upon Shelley's companionship and into his power. They were both very young, utterly inexperienced; and he had wild views about the relationships between men and women as well as upon most other subjects, in which she was perfectly willing to follow. In these circumstances it is very much to the credit of the lawless young man that, though somewhat embarrassed and bewildered by the overpowering trust which Harriet showed in him, he married her, and gave the reckless foolish girl all the safeguards which the most carefully guarded bride could have required. He was not twenty when (in the year 1811) this marriage took place, and it completed the wild confusion of his life; since the poor young pair were equally inexperienced and unwise, though one of them had the lamp of genius, not to guide, but to mislead them on their devious way. They wandered vaguely about after this, in Scotland one time, in Wales the next, meeting with all kinds of tragi-comic adventures, and living a life which was never more than half-real. It was in this phase of his existence that we find him starting up suddenly in the path of Southey, who gives his opinion of the young wanderer as follows:—



of mine is a man at Keswick who acts upon me as my own ghost would do—his name is Shelley. Beginning with romances of ghosts and murder, and with poetry at Eton, he passed at Oxford into metaphysics; printed half-a-dozen pages which he entitled *The Necessity of Atheism*; sent one anonymously to Copleston, in expectation, I suppose, of converting him; was expelled in consequence; married a girl of seventeen, after being turned out of doors by his father; and here they both are, in lodgings, living upon two hundred which his father allows him. He is come to the fittest physician in the world. At present he has got to the Pantheistic stage of philosophy, and in the course of a week I expect he will be a Berkleyan, for I have put him upon a course of Berkeley. It has surprised him a good deal to meet, for the first time in his life, with a man who perfectly understands him, and does him full justice. I tell him that all the difference between us is that he is nineteen and I am thirty-seven."

Excellent Southey! He did not suspect how absolutely out of all possibility of resemblance were his own well-ordered conservative character and this wild spirit of the clouds and elements, the fantastic delicate Ariel of poetry. How sternly different his opinions became afterwards will be apparent farther on.

Of Shelley's momentary repose amid the quietness of the lake country we know little more than this. Soon he was away again, as changeful as summer lightning, flashing now here, now there, unrestrained and irresponsible. His extreme youth adds a pathetic touch to the record of fitful misadventures, unhappineses, panics, and quarrels, which in itself could scarcely be other than ridiculous. It was in 1813, a year after Southey formed this opinion of him, that *Queen Mab* was printed—a strange poem which he did not after care to reckon among his works, and which shows traces of something like the influence of Southey in its measure and structure, though so completely unlike in everything else. *Mab*, a fairy queen most un-Shakspearian, carries off the soul of Ianthe—for no particular reason the poet knows of—to show her the past and present of the earth: that is to say, the horrors

that Religion and Government have wrought, with side glimpses into the miseries inflicted by kings, and the supreme tyranny of the God whom Christianity has imagined. It is a rhapsody, an impassioned embodiment of that fervent creed of Atheism which in those days had here and there a prophet, as again in our own. Shelley thought, like other enthusiasts, that the world was to be freed of all its troubles by the recognition of his tenets of faith, or rather, as it was in his case, of no faith—its abrogation of God, and law and rule. He had begun to correspond with Godwin while he was at Keswick, and the doctrines of *Political Justice* had taken hold on his congenial mind. It appears by some authorities that *Queen Mab* was begun at a much earlier period of his career; but the verse with which the poem opens bears very distinct marks of *Thalaba* about it:—

“How wonderful is Death!  
Death and his brother Sleep—  
One pale as yonder waning moon  
With lips of lurid blue;  
The other rosy as the morn  
When, throned on ocean's wave,  
It flashes o'er the world:  
Yet both so passing wonderful!”

Out of this Southeyan echo, however, the young poet falls after a while into dignified and melodious blank verse, even in this early and chaotic utterance, which neither in sentiment nor poetry is very much worth any one's while. It is said that Shelley, who printed it for private circulation, sent a copy to Byron with a letter, in which he enumerated all the accusations he had heard against his elder brother in poetry, with a demand to know if they were true; as, if false, he wished to make Byron's acquaintance. Altogether, it is evident that the young poet, in the elation of his genius, felt himself full

of power, and in a position to influence and almost command. Among other enterprises, he went solemnly to Ireland to assist in Catholic emancipation, strong in that unbounded belief in reason, and in himself as the expositor of reason, which a young man may be pardoned for entertaining at nineteen. He was still under twenty when he became a father, his poor little wife being still younger. Their life was one of perpetual difficulties of all kinds, as well as of restless and continual wanderings. Sometimes Shelley got an allowance from his father, sometimes lived precariously on the help afforded by Harriet's family and a sister of hers, who after a while came to live with them, and tyrannised over the pair of foolish wedded children. Leigh Hunt asserts that his position as heir of entail made it possible for him to secure from the Jews an income of a thousand pounds a year, upon the security of his future prospects, which seems feasible, since even a poet cannot subsidise and pension his friends unless he has some money to do it with; but this may have been at a later period. He married his poor young wife a second time in March 1814, at St. George's, Hanover Square, lest there should be any question of the legality of their Scotch marriage and in order, it appears, to secure to her quite certainly in case of his death the portion to which the widow of Sir Timothy Shelley's son would be entitled. This cautious step had scarcely been taken when the pair seem to have separated. It is not necessary to enter here into the much discussed and much questioned dates of these incidents. Shelley had begun to visit Godwin, with whom for some time he had kept up a close correspondence, and for whom he seems to have conceived a reverential attachment, in the beginning of this year; and in Godwin's homely house, in the parlour behind the bookseller's shop, in the midst of the mixed family which consisted of Mary Woilstonecraft's daughter and the existent Mrs

Godwin's daughter, besides Godwin's own children, the young poet had seen a fair and serious girl of seventeen, full of philosophies and fancies like himself, and with a charm for him which Harriet had never possessed; for Harriet, it is supposed, had loved Shelley more than Shelley ever loved her, and had by this time fully convinced him that happiness with her was impossible. The story is altogether wild and strange, like his own mind. Whether he separated with a certain formality from his wife, whether he went off suddenly, leaving her with her two babies and fourteen shillings in her pocket, no one seems able to decide. The only thing certain is, that meeting with Mary Godwin suddenly "one eventful day in St. Pancras Churchyard by her mother's grave," he declared his love to the enthusiast girl, who had been brought up to believe in no necessary restraints upon such a passion. He told her his story "how he had suffered, how he had been misled, and how, if supported by her love," says the sympathetic historian, Lady Shelley, "he hoped in future years to enrol his name with the wise and good, who had done battle for their fellow-men, and had been true through all adverse storms to the cause of humanity. Unhesitatingly she placed her hand in his and linked her fortune with his own." No doubt the poet had eloquence at his command, and that the girl, so young and come of such a race, believed not only fervently in "the cause of humanity," which he intended to serve, but in her own power to support him by her love. A mother's grave seems a strange place for such a declaration; but not in this case, for no one would have been so ready as Mary Wollstonecraft to acknowledge the claim of love, and to dispense with the sanction of law. To neither of them did marriage seem either sacred or necessary. Harriet did not satisfy the poet; she was not enough for him: he had ceased to love her; what more

was there to say? Such was the creed of both. "Unhesitatingly" they linked their lives together. The verses which he addressed to her, probably in the moment of doubt before the decision was come to, do more to soften our hearts than any other particular in the tale:—

"Upon my heart thy accents sweet  
Of peace and pity fell like dew  
On flowers half-dead; thy lips did meet  
Mine tremblingly, thy dark eyes threw  
Their soft persuasion on my brain,  
Charming away its dream of pain.

"We are not happy, sweet! our state  
Is strange, and full of doubt and fear—  
More need of words that ills abate.  
Reserve or censure come not near  
Our sacred friendship, lest there be  
No solace left for thee or me.

"Gentle and good and mild thou art,  
Nor can I live if thou appear  
Aught but thyself, or turn thy heart  
Away from me, or stoop to wear  
The mask of scorn, although it be  
To hide the love thou feel'st for me."

It is wonderful to think of this young pair, with all their feelings and impulses warped into a wrong way, calling good evil, and evil good, and believing that the indulgence of their inclinations was a sort of duty, setting out together in defiance of all law and sacred custom and constancy, without sense of guilt or feeling of shame. The elopement took place in July 1814, only a few months after the re-marriage. Shelley was only twenty-two even now, and Mary not seventeen. The deserted wife, left behind with her two children, came between the other two in age, and was still under twenty. They were little more than children, fantastic, wayward, and self-willed, playing with the mysteries of life, and not knowing what

they did. It is half pitiful, half ludicrous, to hear the account of this wild and criminal journey, which is like the freak of a couple of truant children running away from school, if it had not been for the tragical climax that was to follow. Godwin believed in marriage as little as they did, and had both written and spoken against it as one of the slaveries of the race; but he was a respectable London citizen, a sort of John Gilpin in his way, notwithstanding all his lofty theories, and that his young visitor should thus carry off his child did not please him any more than it would have pleased a much less philosophical parent. It is curious to note how indulgently the world has judged the actors in this wild drama. Neither then nor now has any harsh judgment been passed upon Mary Shelley. That offence which people are so fond of saying is always cruelly visited upon the woman, scarcely seems to have told against her. When the event occurred which turned the tale of lawless love into a tragedy, when poor Harriet, forsaken, took away her own life, no one concerned has any strong feeling in the matter except one of pity for Shelley and his new companion. We are almost required to regard the suicide as an ill-natured act towards these two innocent people on the part of the third, whose existence, indeed, was sadly in their way, but whose death was a reproach to them: so strangely do human partialities colour the events of life.

Before this terrible interruption of the curious, irresponsible self-pleasing life of the young poet, there had, however, been an interval, in which many events occurred. Shelley was not much less an unsettled wanderer with Mary than he had been with Harriet; but under the great trees in Windsor Park, on the edge of which he lived for some time, and afloat upon the soft-flowing Thames, the great tide of poetry, which had already moved within him in broken impulses, rose full in his mind.

The first of his poems, which really was worthy of his powers—*Alastor*—was written in the first year of this union. It is the first real indication of the new voice which had awakened in English literature. It was like nothing else then existing; nor do we know to what to compare it in the past. Shelley had no story to tell, no character to disclose; his was pure poetry, music such as charmed the ear and filled the mouth with sweetness. Never was poet so eager to teach, or with so many wild assertions to make, or so strong a conviction of the possibility of influencing humanity and changing the world; but the soul of his poetry was the same as that of music, not definite, scarcely articulate, only melodious, ineffably sweet. *Alastor* was ushered into the world with a somewhat pompous preface, in which it is described as “allegorical of one of the most interesting situations of the human mind,” the search of the poetic spirit, which has exhausted every form of intellectual enjoyment, for something better, for the ideal, which he seeks in vain to find in another human being. “The picture is not barren of instruction to actual men. The poet’s self-centred seclusion was avenged by the furies of an irresistible passion pressing him to sudden ruin.” But the reader never pays much attention to the directions which prescribe to him what he is to understand and admire; and probably no one now thinks of looking at the preface, or even asks, as he reads, what *Alastor* means; for, indeed, the meaning is wholly lost in the music of the words. “Actual men” have nothing to do with it; and it conveys no lesson, nor anything that is within the reach of the practical. This was not the intention of the writer; to his own thinking, he was nothing if not a teacher.

The simplicity of the primitive moral which Coleridge by poetical caprice chose to affix to his *Ancient Mariner* reappears, in still less feasible connection with anything

that has gone before, in the new strain. Probably it was the example of that poem which suggested to Shelley the idea of putting a moral to his rhapsody. "Those who love not their fellow-beings live unnatural lives, and prepare for their old age a miserable grave," he says, from his pulpit as it were: and then plunges into the word-music, the soft fleeting of melodious syllables, descriptions of what never was in earth or air. Here is the first striking of the key-note, more definite than anything that follows:—

"Earth, ocean, air, beloved brotherhood !  
If our great Mother has imbued my soul  
With aught of natural piety to feel  
Your love, and recompense the boon with mine ;  
If dewy morn, and odorous noon, and even,  
With sunset and its gorgeous ministers,  
And solemn midnight's tingling silentness ;  
If autumn's hollow sighs in the sere wood,  
And winter robing with pure snow and crowns  
Of starry ice the gray grass and bare boughs ;  
If spring's voluptuous pantings when she breathes  
Her first sweet kisses, have been dear to me ;  
If no bright bird, insect, or gentle beast  
I consciously have injured, but still loved  
And cherished these my kindred ; then forgive  
This boast, beloved brethren, and withdraw  
No portion of your wonted favour now !

"Mother of this unfathomable world !  
Favour my solemn song, for I have loved  
Thee ever, and thee only ; . . .

. . . . .

And though ne'er yet  
Thou hast unveiled thy inmost sanctuary,  
Enough from incommunicable dream,  
And twilight phantasms and deep noonday thought,  
Has shone within me, that serenely now  
And moveless, as a long-forgotten lyre  
Suspended in the solitary dome  
Of some mysterious and deserted fane,  
I wait thy breath, Great Parent, that my strain



May modulate with murmurs of the air,  
And motions of the forests and the sea,  
And voice of living beings, and woven hymns  
Of night and day, and the deep heart of man."

This aspiration was as near fulfilled in Shelley's verse as poetical prayer could be; not his was Wordsworth's lofty religious use of nature and her sacred sights and sounds; not his the mystic revelations which Coleridge found in the unseen: but a voice modulated "with murmurs of the air and motions of the forests," with all the inarticulate harmony of being, with those fragmentary thoughts that give a soul to the musings of the solitary, and those profound sensations which move the heart, all the more deep for being undefined. The old-fashioned harp had come back to the hands that could touch it. The instructors, the prophets, the seers, even the minstrels had a different office. Shelley was song embodied. In vain did he pour forth miles of verses, his *Alastor*, his *Revolt of Islam*, his wild politics and wilder morals upon the world, believing in his inmost soul that this was his mission, to convince men that their God was a Fiend and their laws tyranny, and that Godwin's *Political Justice* was the new gospel. Mankind has instincts which are wiser than genius. We have rejected, some with horror, but more with a smile, his vain teachings; but we have not rejected Shelley. So long as he stands before the world and sings, we will listen though his subjects be to us as folly and his meaning as madness. No matter what he says—even the *Witch of Atlas*, even the *Epipsy-chidion*, which the multitude can only listen to with a bewildered sense of something melodious but no clearer notion—contain such a soul of harmony as beguiles the sternest critic. It is like that voice which Wordsworth heard in the harvest field. We do not even ask to know what it is about—

“ Whate’er the theme the Maiden sang,  
As if her song could have no ending.

. . . . .

I listen motionless and still ;  
And as I mounted up the hill,  
The music in my heart I bore  
Long after it was heard no more.”

After the composition of *Alastor*, Shelley, with his Mary and the young woman who had accompanied them on their first flight, Jane Clairmont, the daughter of Mary’s stepmother, went to Switzerland in the early summer of 1816 ; and here it was that Byron, setting out, sick with trouble and discovery, and a disorderly life, upon the second tragical round of his pilgrimage, encountered the other poet and his belongings in the neighbourhood of Geneva. In opposition to the story that Shelley had sent *Queen Mab* to Byron with a sort of indictment against him and desire to know if these things were true, it is said by some that Shelley now sent to Byron an account of the sins attributed to himself, and desired his acquaintance if he thought fit to bestow it on knowing all that was said against him. However that might be, the two met at the inn, where they both lived, and formed instant acquaintance. There is as much in common among poets as among craftsmen of a humbler kind. Coleridge and Southey first, Coleridge and Wordsworth afterwards, had come by freemasonry of genius and youth into instant friendship and mutual communication to each other of all poetical properties some twenty years before. What a wonderful difference between that frugal and poor brotherhood, pure, honourable, and unknown, in all their flush of youthful ardour and high thought, and this other two, perhaps more splendidly endowed, richer, of higher fortunes, and far more unhappy ! The former held their position against all the pinches of need, in face

of the outcry of the world. What could the world do to them? Coleridge, indeed, exposed himself to much painful criticism and comment, especially in the latter part of his career; but the others lived such upright and simple lives, as took all possibility of a sting out of every evil tongue, and vindicated the high office of poetry over all the world. They preached the sacredness of love, the wonder and mystery of life, the nobleness of duty, the loveliness of self-devotion. Strange contrast! The younger brethren proclaimed a different, an altered code. Duty to them had no existence, nor authority, nor the restraints of nature grave and chaste. Their principle was that of self-will, the satisfaction of desire, the destruction of control, the perfect liberty of doing, not as they ought, but as they would. To Shelley's fantastic soul, the fact that a certain thing "ought" to be done made the doing of it an offence against human freedom. It was not that he loved evil, for, notwithstanding his desertion of one woman for another, there is no evidence in him of a nature impure. But immorality, as we name it, was to him a matter of principle, and the wish of the moment a sacred impulse which it was duty to obey. Byron, a thousand times less innocent, was without this visionary philosophical preference for the forbidden, and while he sinned was ever conscious of a tremor of conscience; but with Shelley, all instincts were good, and that self-will which Christianity insists shall be subdued, was the only god and potentate he acknowledged. Byron, so far as appears, had no philosophical code, but he was a man of unbridled self-regard and what we call passions—and when he wished for anything secured it when that proved possible, without proclaiming it right to do so, yet with a preponderance of fleshly appetite to which the sectary beside him was a stranger. To carry out the contrast, this second group and brotherhood of poets on the banks of another lake fell into a manner of united

living which controverted not only the laws and customs of society, but all that the common consent of mankind has considered necessary for the well-being of the race. The strange code in which the children of Godwin's house had been trained, and which the three wilful young souls who composed Shelley's irregular party, held with combative ardour, saw little harm in the idea that the friend-sister who had accompanied Mary should become to Byron what Mary was to Shelley. It is possible even that they may have believed this connection a possible way of reclaiming and saving Byron, as Shelley congratulated himself on having been saved. As for Byron, a soul far more polluted, he plucked without hesitation a flower where he could find it, and in the desperation of his soul, after the catastrophe which had made all pretences at respectability useless to him, was ready to plunge into any and every such excitement. Thus license reigned in one company of the poets, to whom, the one philosophically, the other sensually, inclination and passion were the powers that swayed existence—a wonderful contrast to the stainless living and lofty teaching of the elder brotherhood among the colder lakes and mountains of the north.

This joint life lasted for about four months, a whole wonderful (but wet and stormy) summer. The Shelleys took a smaller house near to the greater one inhabited by Byron. They were both poor enough; but it was the reckless pennilessness of a wealthy class always capable of procuring luxuries, and not the thrifty and limited existence of the really poor. Their life was spent in a succession of refined and delightful amusements, in boating parties on the lake, in moonlight wanderings, in parties of poetic conversation prolonged far into the night, which sometimes made it expedient that one household belated should encamp under the roof of the other: all was indulgence, pleasure, society, without any of those limits

which ordinary life enforces. Once the two poets set out together round the shores of the lake, going over the scenery of Rousseau's great work with enthusiasm and emotion indescribable. Shelley had never read the *Heloise* before, which was so happy a chance! They lingered about "sweet Clarens, birthplace of deep Love," and strayed through the "bosquet de Julie" silent, moved almost to tears, glad that no vulgar spectator was by to see their emotion: and felt that Rousseau had not chosen for uses of fiction this wonderful landscape, but that it was the very "scene which passion must allot to the mind's purified being." It is to be feared that most of us nowadays find the Lake Lemau somewhat prosaic, remembering little and caring less about Julie and St. Preux, unwholesome lovers; but to Byron and Shelley they were divine. Off the rocks of Meillerie they were once caught in a storm, and for the moment looked for nothing but destruction. All this may be seen reflected in the third canto of *Childe Harold*, which is little more than a poetical narrative of the musings and wanderings of that summer holiday. Shelley would seem to have been passive for the moment, receiving all these images into his mind without immediate use of them: but Byron was in full tide of creative power, roused by the great storm of his life into restless energy and force. He could not be still or keep silence in that flood-tide of his genius. His passions, his wild impulses, his wrongs, surged high within him and quickened every faculty. "Agitation or contest of any kind," he himself says, "gives a rebound to my spirits, and sets me up for the time." Perhaps, too, though the breaking up of his life contained so much that was miserable, it was a relief to him to get rid of the unreal and wretched existence which he had been leading in London, in forced subjection to rules which he hated, and in companionship with a woman whose inspiration, in

every point, was at variance with his own. And Shelley, too, had wrongs and profound grievances, which sometimes burned within him, and sometimes overflowed in expressions of anguish. They were both miserable and injured because the world would not permit them, unchecked, to do as they would, and retained to themselves the privilege of railing, with high indignation and poetic fervour, against that world and its restrictions, even while emancipated from its jurisdiction, and following their own pleasures triumphantly as the rule of their life. Strange contrast and pendant to the poetic life of Grassmere and Keswick, with all their pieties and solemnities, the grave simplicity, the laborious calms, the mountain stillness, and voices of the cataract from the steeps! On Lake Lemane the two young pairs talked endless sentiment, shed tears of voluptuous emotion, talked through the warmth of summer nights, floated in their boats on the warm bosom of the luxurious lake; or were awed by the semi-grand, semi-theatrical artillery of the storm among the mountains, and in the midst of their enjoyments gave themselves up to corresponding storms of injured feeling, of reproach and fiery outcry against earth and heaven. What had earth and heaven done to them? Objected to let them have their own way—that, and little more.

The third canto of *Childe Harold* has a warmth of individual life in it, an emotion and power which the vaguer miseries and wanderings of the previous portions of that poem share in a much smaller measure. Everybody remembers the address to Ada with which it opens, and which is so much more genuine and real than the theatrical commonplace of Byron's *Farewell*. Nor is the key of real emotion, thus strongly struck, ever altogether lost through all the changes and variations of the strain. Some of his finest rhetorical passages, some of the tenderest touches of musing, of which by times his fiery soul was

capable, are to be found here. The description of the night before Waterloo is now what people call hackneyed—the strongest evidence of its splendid force and effect which could be offered—since no poem is ever hackneyed which has not gone straight to the popular heart. It has embodied for us the wonderful excitement of that historical scene as few historians could do, setting before us as in a picture, as in a vision, the stern marching columns, the dark preparations and readiness underneath, with that light glowing brilliant scene in front of it suddenly arrested, the mirth turned to horror and dismay, the gay sounds into a silence of tragic suspense and despair. It is so breathless, so full of movement and excitement, that the reader has no time to consider its claims to poetical excellence. He is swept away by the force of it, as if he had heard it glowing from the lips of the spectator: it is eloquence of the highest kind. On the other hand, those pictures of natural scenery which in Byron's earlier days had been somewhat vague and conventional, have taken a new intensity and reality of life. The following landscape, the very background of land and water upon which the life of the two poets was set, we select almost at random among many. Everything is in it, sound and sight, and the sentiment of the summer night with all its exquisite sensations and associations.

“It is the hush of night, and all between  
Thy margin and the mountains, dusk, yet clear,  
Mellowed and mingling, yet distinctly seen,  
Save darken'd Jura, whose cap't heights appear  
Precipitously steep; and drawing near,  
There breathes a living fragrance from the shore  
Of flowers yet fresh with childhood; on the ear  
Drops the light drip of the suspended oar,  
Or chirps the grasshopper one good-night carol more;

“He is an evening reveller, who makes  
His life an infancy, and sings his fill;

At intervals, some bird from out the brakes  
Starts into voice a moment, then is still.  
There seems a floating whisper on the hill ;  
But that is fancy, for the starlight dews  
All silently their tears of love instil,  
Weeping themselves away, till they infuse  
Deep into nature's breast the spirit of her hues.

"Ye stars ! which are the poetry of heaven,  
If in your bright leaves we would read the fate  
Of men and empires,—'tis to be forgiven,  
That in our aspirations to be great,  
Our destinies o'erleap their mortal state,  
And claim a kindred with you ; for ye are  
A beauty, and a mystery, and create  
In us such love and reverence from afar,  
That fortune, fame, power, life, have named themselves a star.

"All heaven and earth are still—though not in sleep  
But breathless as we grow when feeling most ;  
And silent, as we stand in thoughts too deep :  
All heaven and earth are still :—from the high host  
Of stars, to the lulled lake and mountain-coast,  
All is concentrated in a life intense,  
Where not a beam, nor air, nor leaf is lost,  
But hath a part of being, and a sense  
Of that which is of all Creator and defence."

If it were not that the soft purity and sweetness of this picture is invaded and disturbed beyond remedy by the other features of the story, we might be tempted to forgive all that was included within the framework of this lovely scene ; and, putting aside the ugly facts of the story, the intercourse of these two young poets, their prolonged and endless talk, the mutual stimulation of minds so extraordinary, has an interest which nothing can take from it. They were both in the earliest chapter of manhood, though one of them had already wrecked the prospects of his life, and the other set himself at variance with every authority, and transgressed at least one primary law of nature. Lawless and defiant of all rule, yet hot



and indignant that the society they outraged should have pronounced against them, they stood beneath the pitying heavens, the most nobly endowed of all their generation—two rebel angels, beautiful, fortunate, unhappy; everything in nature ministering to them, offering of its best; with faculties within them rich enough to atone for every privation, yet enduring none—proud voluntary outcasts, revolted kings of men.

On one of these wanderings, detained for a couple of days by rain and stormy weather in little Ouchy by the waterside, not far from the sober coqueties of Lausanne, where Gibbon has left his formal memory, Byron wrote the *Prisoner of Chillon*, one of the most perfect and purest of his poems, but perhaps the least like his of anything that ever came from his hand. It is the one grand tribute which the great rebel of the age paid to Wordsworth, its greatest yet most strongly-resisted influence; and why that shadow should have touched and stilled his spirit just at this tumultuous moment who can tell? It is one of the strangest caprices of his genius. Chillon, where it stands projected into the silent blueness of the lake, with its oubliettes, its dungeons, and those gloomy openings into the water that suggest many a nameless victim, has no doubt a dark and eventful history; but this little poem is its record to the world, and nobody, now at least, asks further. No one of Byron's poems is so purely narrative, or has such a unity of lofty and tender interest, uninterrupted by a single distracting image. But this very perfection makes it tame and cold among the heat and animation of the rest: it is the only one in which Byron is left out. No Harold smiles or strides between the massive pillars. For once the conception of a being, who is not himself, has entered his mind, an atmosphere of love and reverence and acknowledgment of the sanctities of human affection. We might

be beguiled into a speculation whether some wavering of the compass towards virtue and truth, some vague comprehension of the secret of a higher happiness had come to him from that calm of nature ; but there is no record elsewhere of any such pause in the force of the torrent which was his life.

Byron was not always in this chastened and purified mood ; but he was in great intellectual activity during this period, his mind thrilling with new life and passion. He composed *The Dream*—that curious picturesque sentimental review of his own life, and insinuation of a remote and inadequate cause for all its imperfections—at the same time ; and also the address *To Augusta*, and several other detached poems, all eloquent, animated, and fine. On the other hand, it would not be difficult to find episodes which are full of glittering rhetoric and little more. Of these is the well-known description of the storm among the mountains :—

“The sky is changed !—and such a change ! Oh night,  
And storm, and darkness, ye are wondrous strong,  
But lovely in your strength, as is the light  
Of a dark eye in woman ! Far along,  
From peak to peak, the rattling crags among,  
Leaps the live thunder ! Not from one lone cloud,  
But every mountain now has found a tongue,  
And Jura answers, through her misty shroud,  
Back to the joyous Alps, who call to her aloud !

“And this is in the night :—Most glorious night !  
Thou wert not made for slumber ! let me be  
A sharer in thy fierce and far delight,—  
A portion of the tempest and of thee !  
How the lit lake shines, a phosphoric sea,  
And the big rain comes dancing to the earth !  
And now again 'tis black,—and now, the glee  
Of the loud hills shakes with its mountain-mirth,  
As if they did rejoice o'er a young earthquake's birth.”

Another curious production of the two poetic house-

holds must here be noted. Lewis, popularly known as Monk Lewis, paid Byron a visit at his villa, and became one of the little society, which was often confined within four walls by the rain, and eager after every new excitement, as people imprisoned in a country house so universally are. They told each other ghost stories, and tales of mystery and wonder under the inspiration of the kind little inoffensive romancer, who was then master of that branch of the arts; and he or some one else suggested that they should all write for their mutual diversion tales of this character. The only one who carried out the suggestion was Mary, the youngest of the party, a girl not yet eighteen, notwithstanding the turmoil of life into which she had been plunged. That a young creature of this age should have produced anything at once so horrible and so original as the hideous romance of *Frankenstein*, is one of the most extraordinary accidents in literature; and that she should never, having made such a beginning, have done anything more, is almost equally wonderful. Byron is said to have begun a similar sketch, entitled *The Vampyre*, which his physician-attendant, Polidori, afterwards added to and printed; but none of the detailed records of the time inform us what were the feelings of excitement and terror with which the little company, thrilled by the tales of Lewis, listened to the portentous and extraordinary production with which the fair small girl, with her big forehead and her sedate aspect, out-Heroded Herod. Mary Shelley's individual appearances afterwards are only those of a romantically-desolate widow, pouring out her grief and fondness in sentimental gushes, which look somewhat overstrained and ridiculous in print, whatever they may have done in fact; but to hear her read, with her girlish lips, this most extraordinary and terrible of imaginations, must have been a sensation unparalleled. It is one of the books adopted into the

universal memory, which everybody alludes to, and thousands who can never have read it understand the main incidents of—which is a wonderful instance of actual fame. That this should be merely stated as a fact in the history, and no one pause to wonder at it, is another odd instance of the insensibility of contemporaries.

Shelley and his companions left Switzerland in the end of August 1816, breaking up this poetical society, and returned to England. Byron stayed longer, until other friends—his always faithful brethren, Sir John Cam Hobhouse and Mr. Scrope Davies—joined him: and went on in October to Italy. There he settled, in Venice, where his life is said to have been such as scandal itself dislikes to dwell upon. His letters are of the same lively and superficial character as before, but, when any evidence of feeling breaks out, there is nothing but disappointment and misery in the record. “My day is over,” he says to Moore. “What then? I have had it. To be sure, I have shortened it”—and he describes the poems he had sent home from Switzerland, especially the third canto of *Childe Harold*, as “a fine indistinct piece of poetical desolation.” “I was very mad during the time of its composition,” he adds, “between metaphysics, mountains, lakes, love inextinguishable, thoughts unutterable, and the nightmare of my own delinquencies. I should many a day have blown my brains out, but for the recollection that it would have given great pleasure to my mother-in-law.” Amid this levity it is hard to understand how much real feeling there was. His “love inextinguishable” was no doubt the passages with Miss Clairmont, which lasted but a little time; but that there is a kind of madness in the headlong and irregular life which avoids all pauses for thought, and keeps itself intoxicated with something—mountains and moonlight, or light loves, or

grosser stimulants—no one will deny. Unfortunately it is not the poet only who applies such opiates to a troubled conscience and a broken life.

The third canto of *Childe Harold* had expressed the more manly moods of Byron's mind, and the more wholesome interests of his life; but all the time, while he floated about the lake and climbed the hills and composed those melodious stanzas, another poem of a different order was shaping itself in his mind. From the often noble musings of *Childe Harold*, and the grave tenderness and dignity of the *Prisoner of Chillon*, he threw himself back upon the old stage-hero, upon that theatrical sufferer of the past, the Conrad, the Lara, of former years, and made him into a shape still more tragic and solitary. It is curious to read all the tranquil extracts from his Swiss diary, which are quoted as notes to *Manfred* by way of showing how much real observation and study of nature was in that poem, and to perceive how carefully all the images that struck him at the moment are saved up for use, and how the scenes of his careless journey, cheerfully recorded and made in the congenial company of friends, are made to serve and heighten the solitary sufferings of the self-tormented hero. *Manfred* has passed, we think, in great measure, from the mind of the reader. The number of students who read an author through, and know everything he has written, is always few. The greater part of the world makes instinctive selection of what is immortal, and leaves the rest, if not to perish, at least to freeze and crystallise, without any living soul of human remembrance to keep it fresh. But at the moment when these works are getting published, nobody can tell which it will be that posterity will choose: and when we read Jeffrey's awe-stricken applause and Wilson's enthusiastic appreciation, and find that even such an authority as Goethe declares Manfred's mouthings of mock despair

to be an improvement on Hamlet's soliloquy, the extraordinary mistake takes away our breath. The one idea of Byron's limited imagination had been worked hardly enough in the previous tales, which made no such claim upon the reader. Subdued and enshrined in the fine poetry of *Childe Harold*, it has been added to the permanent population of the world; but to place this conventional form among the mighty mountains, and to surround him, in emulation of greater witcheries, with the vapoury visions of an unseen rather more vague and pyrotechnic than himself, was a rash and unfortunate experiment. The subject is one which only the most exceptional merit in the poetry could make tolerable; and the poetry is not exceptional, but below the highest level of Byron's power. To compare his *diablerie* with that of Goethe, or the songs of the spirits whom Manfred evokes, with the melody of Shelley's responses in the *Prometheus*, is to put him at an extraordinary disadvantage. Mr. Matthew Arnold has selected several of these dialogues between the magician and the powerful creatures of the air and elements whom he is supposed to call forth, as instances of Byron's dramatic power; but the dramatic meaning of these passages is surely of the smallest. The following fragment of a scene, after a laboured representation of the court of Ahrimanes, and the turbulent spirit-courtiers who endeavour vainly to make Manfred do homage to their ruler, does for one brief moment thrill the reader. After failing in all his demands upon the ærial potentates, he requires that the dead should be raised, the spirit of his love and victim, that from her he may understand the final mysteries. "Speak to me," he exclaims, when the vision stands silent before him—

"Yet speak to me! I have outwatch'd the stars,  
And gazed o'er heaven in vain in search of thee.  
Speak to me! I have wander'd o'er the earth,

And never found thy likeness—Speak to me !  
 Look on the fiends around—they feel for me :  
 I fear them not, and feel for thee alone—  
 Speak to me ! though it be in wrath ;—but say—  
 I reckon not what—but let me hear thee once—  
 This once—once more !

*Phantom of Astarte.* Manfred !

*Man.*

Say on, say on—

I live but in the sound—it is thy voice !

*Phan.* Manfred ! To-morrow ends thine earthly ills.  
 Farewell !

*Man.* Yet one word more—am I forgiven ?

*Phan.* Farewell !

*Man.* Say, shall we meet again ?

*Phan.* Farewell !

*Man.* One word for mercy ! Say, thou lovest me.

*Phan.* Manfred !”

In this scene there is great force and an almost awful pathos. The impossibility, even when the highest spells have been spoken and the most terrible dangers run, to receive any satisfying token from beyond the grave : and the anguish of the man’s appeal to a being so far beyond his reach, who has so entirely escaped him, yet was once his, is very powerful and effective. In a very different way, and with a sudden rupture of continuity and every dramatic rule, the description of the moonlight night and of the Colosseum in Rome may be called fine poetry : but nothing could be more entirely out of place in the soliloquy of a racked and tortured spirit on the brink of destruction. “ ’Tis strange that I recall it at this time,” Manfred himself acknowledges in the very spirit of Mr. Puff and his critics. And it seems very unnecessary to create a highly endowed and intellectual spirit for the purpose of singing a song like this ;—

“ Mont Blanc is the monarch of mountains,  
 They crowned him long ago,  
 On a throne of rocks, in a robe of clouds,  
 With a diadem of snow.”

Dr. Watts could have done it quite as well.

Byron lived in Venice for nearly four years. It would be out of place here to enter into the history of his life. He seems to have been delivered from the grosser indulgence of his senses by a real love, as he understood it, for the Countess Guiccioli, to whom he was deeply attached, yet of whom he wrote to his English correspondents with a levity which is little appropriate to a woman adored. In Venice he wrote *Manfred*; the concluding canto of *Childe Harold*; various shorter poems, which count for little among his works; *Mazeppa*; and at the same time made a beginning in a new order of verse and new kind of subject, in the airy gallop and original gaiety of *Beppo*; afterwards ripening into the longer and more impassioned strains of *Don Juan*, two cantos of which were written and published during the year 1819, his last in Venice. After this he went to Ravenna, following the lady whose fortunes were henceforward linked with his, and who was faithful and devoted to him, although in a lawless way. It requires no great strain of charity, we think, to pardon Teresa Guiccioli. She was married at sixteen to an old man, according to family arrangement, as was usual; and had scarcely married when she met the fascinating English poet, about whom all Venice was raving, and who was young and noble and unfortunate, an object of romantic interest everywhere. It was according to the morals of her time and country to permit a lover, the tie between the old husband and young wife in a *mariage de convenance* being so unnatural that permitted license has always been the consequence. This Italian girl had never been taught nor known better, and no hero of romance could have exercised a more powerful spell upon a young creature full of romance and sentiment, yet shut out from all legitimate indulgence of the poetry of youth. All that Italian



morality required of her was a discreet audacity in the management of the situation. To English feeling, on the other hand, the rashness of self-devotion is a plea for forgiveness rather than a crime; and the woman who is unable to *ménager* the claims of her husband and her lover has a hold upon our regretful sympathy which a wiser sinner can never claim. We will not be thought to approve an immoral connection in attempting to say a word of tenderness and pity for the sweet and tender Italian girl from whose lips there never falls an unwomanly word, and whose breast was pure of all interested and worldly motives. She deserved far better than to be spoken of with disrespectful levity as la Guiccioli, and discussed by her lover with his publisher and his friends, in tones which probably do little justice to his feeling for her, but are part of the unpleasant garb of levity in which he thought proper to present himself even to those he esteemed most.

During the two years Byron spent in Ravenna he continued at full pressure of work, producing, except *Don Juan*, nothing upon which posterity has laid hands with any passion of approval, but at least one work, which once more set England and the critics by the ears. This was *Cain*, the wild and singular drama in which all the rebellious heroes of Byronic inspiration ascend, so to speak, to their origin and source. The first sceptic, the first doubter, the first rebel, a definite personage in whose difficulties we can at least see reason, attracts more of our sympathies than any weird recluse, or mysterious bandit. It is difficult to understand why, but for the reputation of the author, and a sort of scriptural prejudice against the art which could endeavour to interest us in that first criminal, so great an outcry should have been aroused by this poem, in which there is no real profanity. The sentiments of Lucifer, it is true, are not such as would

become a churchwarden, but they are no more than we should expect from the individual in question. We have all been brought up upon Milton's Satan, and taught to consider his gloomy grandeur, not only as a lawful subject of our regard, but an edifying and religious one. Byron's Lucifer is not nearly so splendid, but he is not more opposed to Christian feeling; his assertion of power equal to that of God is more modern and shallow than Satan's nobler claim; but this vague self-assertion, and his failure to promise anything that can be called happiness as the reward of disobedience, and the tragical issue that follows, have a moral rather than an immoral tendency. What is a great deal more unfortunate is that Byron here falls into the temptation to use big words and swelling syllables to an extent unknown in anything else he has produced: and that Cain's sullen instinct of rebellion, his refusal to worship, his churlish assertion of the fact that he has been brought into the world without being consulted upon the subject, and that gratitude to the power which has bestowed such an equivocal favour as life upon him is by no means a necessity—in themselves sufficiently legitimate subjects of study—is couched in language too big and high sounding for poetry. Here is one of his speeches. and not the most grandiloquent:—

“Oh, thou beautiful  
And unimaginable ether! and  
Ye multiplying masses of increased  
And still increasing lights! what are ye? what  
Is this blue wilderness of interminable  
Air, where ye roll along, as I have seen  
The leaves along the limpid streams of Eden?  
Is your course measured for ye? Or do ye  
Sweep on in your unbounded revelry  
Through an ærial universe of endless  
Expansion—at which my soul aches to think—  
Intoxicated with eternity?”

This is not poetry, whatever it may be; and Byron's philosophy was far from being his strong point. *Cain* is intended for the intensified and primal type of all the *Manfreds* and the *Laras*; but he is inferior to them in language and even dignity. His original attitude of passive rebellion is sulky, and himself churlish and ill-tempered. The primitive rebel and misanthrope wants the draping of the melodramatic cloak and sable plume, the furniture of mystery, in which his predecessors, yet descendants, have the advantage over him.

Of the dramas produced at the same period it is not necessary to say much. They are full of fine passages, and the subjects are worthy the genius of a great poet; but Byron's genius was not dramatic, and political passions, however tragic, do not furnish the individual note which it was in his power to strike. What old Faliero and old Foscari might have been in the hands of Shakspeare, who can say? but even to Shakspeare, who made choice of the "foolish, fond old man," the deceived and mistaken Lear, to produce his highest tragical effect, the intellectual and stoical Venetians would have given a difficult task. Byron acquitted himself creditably of a fine undertaking; but he did not stir the heart of the reader, or add any charm to the enchantments of that city, which has fewer personal associations than any other historical place, and reigns by right of its own beauty solely. The description of Venice given by Lionì in *Marino Faliero*, and which has been quoted to weariness, is perhaps the one passage which has found a place in the popular memory. It would be difficult to find a more beautiful picture, or more true to the scene; but the young noble, leaning over his balcony, and painting for us with so fine a touch the ideal portrait of his beautiful town, is entirely out of place dramatically, and if the interest were stronger, not the most beautiful poetry could

justify such an arrest and hindrance of all the movement for the sake of anything unconnected with it. *Sardanapalus* is more in the poet's way: the effeminate reveller, whom the touch of necessity can turn on the moment into a hero-king, might indeed have afforded a noble subject to a poet perhaps still capable of the same transformation. But none of these works have any right to count as foundations of Byron's fame. If they do not detract from his greatness, that is all. His real titles to immortality lie in *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan*, the two great supporters of his poetic skill.

Mr. Matthew Arnold has characterised poetry as "a criticism of life." It is not, we think, a sufficient definition, but it is just so far as it goes. Poetry has other and, we think, higher qualities. In its creative aspect it reveals new chapters of life to our criticism, and new creatures to run their little round like us, but in a concentrated and perfected circle for our example, not only as commentators, but chief and splendid actors, more great than we. But no poetry has ever more clearly carried out and justified the definition of this writer than that of Byron. His great poems are both criticisms of life, investigations within a limited range of its course and incidents. In *Childe Harold* the poet passes in review all civilised nations, all the scenes of exceptional beauty which have been dearest to mankind—the art that has illustrated and immortalised them, the history which has filled them with undying associations. Man and nature, and knowledge and beauty, all pass before him; or rather it is he—supreme observer, narrator, spectator, of all, heir of time, and lord of creation—who glides by all that has been and that is, made for our instruction, like the types and the prophecies in which even the prophets themselves saw darkly, a meaning to be unfolded only in after generations. In *Don Juan* the situation is somewhat different; the

hero is no longer a spectator, but yet the poet, in him and through him, threading a maze of incidents and innumerable digressions and commentaries, carries on the most lively, profane, unscrupulous criticism of life on which man or poet has ever ventured. Both these critics are, so to speak, on the outside of the subject, fathoming the heart and its deeper mysteries little, yet penetrating social pretences with scornful levity and indignation, with fierce laughter and contempt. The life they comprehend is limited, and their insight is limited; but, so far as it goes, keen as the lightning and recklessly unmerciful. The reader, perhaps, will exclaim against this assertion, taking Byron, as he is so often taken, for the poet of passion, the impersonation of all that is most unbridled and unlimited in human feeling: and we must endeavour as best we can to justify our opinion. It will be necessary, first, however, to indicate what seems to us the essential division which exists between the two theories of life which all poetry, all fiction, and indeed literature in every sphere, has to illustrate and set forth.

And we cannot better illustrate our meaning than by turning back once more upon our comparison of the Wordsworthian and Byronic group—the two great poetic tribes of the period. Nothing can be more different than the two aspects of life of which these poets, on one side and the other, are the critics and expositors. Each has his natural band of sympathisers and disciples. The distinction between them is regulated to some degree by the influence of external position; those who are exempted from their birth from the vulgar burdens of humanity are more likely to enter into the views of the one, those who have their share of toil and privation into the other. But no such external influences hold universally, and many a hardworking soul has found a relief in leaping into the freedom and individualism of Byron's heroes; while to

some, amid all the softnesses and leisure of life, Wordsworth's revelations of supreme and lowly Duty have been a refreshment and renewal of the soul. But the distinction is as clear as that between night and day. He who contemplates life with the eyes of the latter sees men and women bound by a hundred ties, burdened by weights not of their making, under command of duties and of circumstances, and as incapable of extricating themselves from the hands that cling to them, and the exertions that are required of them, as a soldier at his post is incapable of asserting the freedom of a savage to follow his own devices. And a great part of humankind are of the opinion that the career of a man thus burdened—his vindication of truth and honour amid all trials, his steadfast standing at his post, his subordination of himself and his wishes at all cost of pleasure and comfort, and even of existence, to those for whom he is responsible, and the office he has to fulfil—is the worthiest object of regard, of admiration, and sympathy. But the others take a different stand. To them the individual, detached from all other individuals, is the object of supreme interest. The adventures he passes through, the intrigues in which he is entangled, his pleasures, and the price he pays for them, are considered as means of education for himself, and fulfil their highest object in maturing and completing that separate being whose progress, as he moves across the stage of life, without ever losing himself in the crowd or stopping short in his individual career, has a charm which is never exhausted. Whether he sweeps recklessly along upon the tide with Byron, or picks his way through the lessons of experience, like Goethe, he maintains always his isolation, his complete independence, taking what he wants or wishes out of the various groups he passes through, but owing no debt or responsibility to them in return. Life is the study of both schools of poetry, but how different the life! In

the one case full of all the complications of humanity, those liens upon natural freedom which most men have to accept, the burdens that love and pity bind upon the soul, the noble restraints of duty, the inextricable minglings of social existence; in the other an individual career in which these bonds are either eluded or defied, and which, though it gains in unity what it loses in breadth, must always be exceptional—a prodigy and wonder in a world full of confused and interlacing interests. How it is that the progress of such an isolated soul towards perfection, or towards satisfaction—or towards that exhaustion of hope and weariness of soul which the first great poet who handled it has proclaimed with such force in the solemn sadness of Ecclesiastes—should be rather through vices than through virtues, it is hard to tell. But so it is. When a man has fathomed all things, and finds them vanity, it is almost invariably the sinful indulgences, the license and excitement of evil-doing, through which he makes his essays. The art which selects for its sphere this development of individual mind is not necessarily immoral; but it is almost bound to deal with the immoral for the sake of the freedom which is indispensable to its operations, just as the other, which places its ideal in the high fulfilment of duty, must be moral by the mere exigencies of art.

Byron is the chief and greatest British exponent of this classic independence and individualism. Childe Harold and the other more active repetitions of that hero, are presented to us in the stillness of their gloomy self-completion, after they have investigated life and found it nought—like Solomon, a vanity of vanities. But in *Don Juan* we are presented with the process itself, according to the poet's conception of it. And what an extraordinary process it is! This poem, in which Byron has poured out a force and fulness of life which it is hard to find a

match for, spontaneous as running water, rapid, eloquent, extraordinary, full of the vulgarities and pettinesses of the meanest mind, and of sentiments and perceptions worthy of the highest, is a web of reckless and heartless licentiousness from beginning to end. His hero lacks the charm which other and inferior bearers of the name have possessed in that dauntless gallantry and bold confronting of whatever offers—hell and its mysteries, as well as all lesser penalties of the flesh—which have always given the spectator a thrill of admiration for the daring cynic, the splendid criminal of the original legend, the Juan of Molière, even the Giovanni of the opera. Byron's Juan in himself is a mixture of an amiable and pretty youth with a mischievous and elvish spirit. He is no more at best than a dissolute page, to whom vice is partly fun, a depraved Cherubino, an impudent and shameless boy, too trifling to be guilty. After the tragic death of Haidee, which has roused the poet to a higher art, and moved him for the moment into impassioned and genuine poetry, the hero skulks off like a whipped schoolboy. If he had robbed an orchard or a cupboard he could scarcely have been less dignified in his punishment, or more easily cured of his smarting. The heartless and soulless young scapegrace has nothing whatever to do with any higher penalty or consciousness. His whipping over, he goes forth again an impudent young rover once more. It is possible that it pleased the angry spirit of Byron to put forth to the world which he regarded so bitterly, and which he believed had wronged and injured him, a worthless image like this as the quintessence of youth and romance; but it is just as likely that it was the mere recklessness of composition, and that he put down Juan as printers in their proofs sometimes put a hieroglyphic in the place of a much-used letter, to save him the time and trouble necessary for the creation of a worthier hero. And the hero is fitly set in



the greater part of those moral or immoral reflections in which the poet, shameless as himself though so much greater, chooses to frame his rambling story. Criticism of life! Lord Byron is not the first who has dignified the hackneyed fable of uncleanness with that name; but it is strange with what ease it has always been accepted as such, as if life were limited to one combination and confined to the narrow span of existence in which "passion" so called, bears sway.

It would be easy, however, if this were all, to dismiss *Don Juan* as something like the insult to his language and his country which, at the first appearance, to judge by the universal assent of all contemporary writers, it was felt to be. But this strange poet, this cynical commentator upon vice, this critic of wives found out and husbands made ridiculous, of confidential maids and complaisant duennas, and all the frowsy paraphernalia of debauchery, would not have been the wonder he is had there been no admixture in the strain. But when the reader, disgusted, turns the leaf, from where the laughing devil on one page flouts at vice alike and virtue, he finds an angel, all unabashed by such company, unconscious of it, on the next. Imagine the man who, in the midst of his filthy story, drawing breath for a moment to enable him to pile the excitement higher, glides unaware into verses like these:—

"We'll talk of that anon.—'Tis sweet to hear  
At midnight on the blue and moonlit deep  
The song and oar of Adria's gondolier,  
By distance mellow'd, o'er the waters sweep;  
'Tis sweet to see the evening star appear;  
'Tis sweet to listen as the night-winds creep  
From leaf to leaf; 'tis sweet to view on high  
The rainbow, based on ocean, span the sky;  
"  
"Tis sweet to hear the watch-dog's honest bark  
Bay deep-mouth'd welcome as we draw near home;

'Tis sweet to know there is an eye will mark  
Our coming, and look brighter when we come ;  
'Tis sweet to be awaken'd by the lark,  
Or lull'd by falling waters ; sweet the hum  
Of bees, the voice of girls, the song of birds,  
The lisp of children, and their earliest words."

Still worse, still more wonderful, is the contrast between the nasty repetition of an oft-told tale in the discovery of Julia's sin by her husband, and the letter of noble and devoted love which, introduced and followed by the most cynical banter, the poet makes his vulgar *intriguante* write to his impudent boy-lover. Nothing before leads us to expect it, nothing after justifies it. Genius, grown sick of its own wilful self-deseccation, and of all the filth about, flings out into this sudden caprice, and in a moment, and for a moment, vindicates itself. Was it, one wonders, the appeal of some pure glance, the clearness of some reproachful sky, that shamed his reckless spirit? Thus for page after page the riotous brilliant stream runs on, full of everything we hate, yet dazzling us with its sparkle and impetuous flood, which here and there changes, is stilled, and reflects no more vile earth and its most debasing passions, but catches through the tangled shadows in their rank growth overhead, a sudden bewildering glance of heaven.

This redeeming touch, if we may call it so, only added to the natural indignation of the better critics of the time, who were revolted by the introduction of refined sentiments in unworthy mouths, and pure and noble feeling, even a fragment of it, amid the steam and fermentation of impurity. The first two cantos appeared alone in 1819, without the name of either author or publisher, a foolish attempt at mystery which warranted the common reproach that both were ashamed of the production. Mr. Murray, most respectable of publishers, very likely was so; but Byron was not to be concealed. He watched the effect

from his Venetian palace, withdrawn out of reach of all the clamorous voices which hailed it with almost universal reprobation, with something of mingled bravado and alarm, like that of a man who has thrown a bomb and waits to see its effect; and though he professes the utmost indifference to that effect, there would seem little doubt that it did move him. The after cantos contain nothing like the story of Haidee for beauty and tenderness; but neither are they so bold in offence. The poet runs away in the voluble easy rattle of his commentary upon the surface of society. Long ere we have got to the end of the stream it has run into a delta of mud and sand, in which the rills of story are lost; and the end is confusion, without either force or meaning of its own, or any connection with what has gone before. The shipwreck and the siege stand out from the midst of the dalliance with all the force of contrast. Few verses have been more constantly quoted than the description of the former, which presents us, when in the midst of a great deal of somewhat grim laughter it touches tragedy, with a very forcible and splendid piece of rhetorical narrative. It is scarcely necessary to allude to the savage onslaught upon the poets of the other school, and especially upon Southey, into which he breaks from time to time, or to the supposed fiercely satirical description of his wife under the character of Donna Inez, with which the poem opens. This is in every respect indefensible, both morally and as a work of art. No poem in the English language that we are aware of, so long and so important, is so unworthy; but its vigour and vitality are as unequalled as are its perversity and cynicism, its fierce abuse and unbridled impurity. There is scarcely a pause or stop in the impetuous and brilliant torrent which pours forth adown plain and hollow, as if from burning springs. It has fallen now into the still current of general literature, and rouses at

least no personal passions; but such was not the case at the moment of its appearance. Byron's best friends in London sat in grave committee upon the manuscript and shook their heads and would have suppressed it altogether, as they afterwards suppressed his autobiographical remains. But the impetuous poet would not listen to them. He was greatly wounded and offended, it is evident, by the comments of "my cursed puritanical committee," as he calls them. "If you had told me the poetry was bad," he says "I would have acquiesced; but they say the contrary, and then talk to me about morality." He threatens therefore that he will write his best book in Italian, though "it will take me nine years more thoroughly to master the language," and declares that he cares nothing for the English public. "I have not written for their pleasure," he cries; "I have never flattered their opinions nor their pride; nor will I. Neither will I make 'ladies' books' *al dilettar le femine e la plebe*. I have written from the fulness of my mind, from passion, from impulse, from many motives, but not for their sweet voices." This passionate disclaimer is so clearly that of a man in the wrong as to require no commentary. It is not the man indifferent to popular applause who protests with such heat that he does not seek it. No one was ever more susceptible to it. At a later period he tells the long-suffering Murray that "the things I have read and heard," after the publication of the first two cantos, "discourage all further publication, at least for the present," and offers pettishly to return the price of the copyright. Disapprobation took the heart out of him. "They have not the spirit of the first," he says of the later cantos. "The outcry has not frightened, but it has hurt me; and I have not written *con amore* this time. It is very decent, however, and as dull as the last new comedy."

The composition of *Don Juan* was stopped half way, at the prayer of Madame Guiccioli, but afterwards resumed. Probably it was intended to be much longer, or at least the poet did not intend that his Pegasus should run away with him into those wide digressions of sharp wit and superficial philosophy, abuse, and scandal, which form the greater part of the poem, and had meant to make his hero illustrate the life of various countries in a much longer succession of adventures. But though his genius had not failed, his life had begun to flag; and to all appearance he let himself be carried away on the current of facile and brilliant verse without taking count where he was going. Probably he was aware that he had lost himself and his purpose, and therefore stopped abruptly with the sudden sensation of impatience and self-disgust which overtook easily a mind so little assured of itself, though so rash and obstinate by times. The graver composition of the plays went on at the same time, and so did the heavy and solemn *Prophecy of Dante*, and his translation of an unreadable Italian poem the *Morgante Maggiore* of Pulci, to which, with his usual strange misapprehension of his own powers, he attached the greatest importance. Pulci was, in his own opinion, the fountain-head from which he got that new spring of poetry which he had essayed in *Beppo*, and made famous in *Don Juan*. It was the rhyme of Hookham Frere's poem of *Whistlecraft*, already referred to; but Byron would not consent to follow the inspiration of Frere. "Pulci," he says, "is the parent not only of *Whistlecraft*, but of all jocose Italian poetry." He did not succeed in interesting Englishmen in this great original, but he made the "light horse gallop" of the measure to be supereminently successful for the discursive treatment he loved, and this was a better demonstration of its merits than any obsolete Italian could have given.

According to all the rules of growth and development, it should have been *Juan* who came first out of the burning fermenting brain of the young poet, and *Childe Harold*, which followed later, out of his maturing mind and calmer intelligence. Had it been so, Byron might perhaps have lived and expanded into greater work and better fame; but this, unhappily, was not the course of his genius. We have already spoken of the early cantos of *Childe Harold* which brought him at a bound to the very pinnacles of fame. If these first bursts of a poetry still vague and half awakened had so great an effect upon the public mind, what must have been the sensation produced when, flying from real ruin and overthrow, the catastrophe which ended all better hope for him, and made him doubly defiant of a world which he believed had used him so hardly—the passionate pilgrim dashed forth once more over the sea into the unknown, full of anguish and resistance, but with every power heightened, and life itself running doubly strong in his veins? In the third canto, the new beginning of this great poem, Byron attains his climax. He has never been so near our sympathies, never so near the deeper secrets of life. For the first time he comes within the range of influences more penetrating and sacred than the passions and semi-fictitious despair of his youth. The air is tremulous about him with a possible conversion. It seems to hang on the poise of a breath, whether the perverse, headstrong, capricious, undisciplined soul may not seek refuge, with its wounds and smarting sense of wrong and misery, amid the soft ministrations of nature, in the grateful stillness of hills and waters, of simplicity and peace. Now and then this possibility seems so near that it is all but realised. The contrast of the “clear placid Leman” with the wild world he has abandoned—

“ Warns me with its stillness to forsake  
Earth’s troubled waters for a purer spring.”

He feels the infinity stir around him as he stands in that solitude where he is least alone ; “ the quiet sail is as a noiseless wing ” carrying him away from all impure distractions. “ Are not the mountains, waves, and skies a part of me and of my soul ? ” he asks in that musing mood, which never was so profound and tender :

“ And thus I am absorb’d, and this is life ;  
I look upon the peopled desert past,  
As on a place of agony and strife,  
Where, for some sin, to sorrow I was cast,  
To act and suffer, but remount at last  
With a fresh pinion ; which I feel to spring,  
Though young, yet waxing vigorous as the blast  
Which it would cope with, on delighted wing,  
Spurning the clay-cold bonds which round our being cling.”

The poet never realised these wavering possibilities. Other influences were too many for him. He went back to the wretched elements of life, and sank down from those dawns of a higher soul to vulgar passion and vulgarer trite cynicism and philosophy. But we have the best of Byron in the last half of the *Pilgrimage*. Everything is stimulated in him : his perceptions, his natural feelings, his capability of thought, and the more liquid and larger music of his verse.

## CHAPTER III.

SHELLEY—BYRON.

SHELLEY and his companions left Lake Lemán in the end of the summer of 1816, leaving Lord Byron there to pursue his course southwards a little later. In November of that same year the tragic incidents to which we have before alluded threw gloom and additional reproach upon the life of the younger poet. Harriet, his young wife, whom he had abandoned nearly two years before, and who in the interval had not lived too wisely or purely, according to the vague accounts given of her by the biographers of Shelley, committed suicide. That this miserable event gave him intense pain almost all agree; as indeed it is impossible to imagine that a being so sensitive could have been indifferent to such a catastrophe. But it certainly cleared his path of an incumbrance, and in six weeks after, his connection with Mary Godwin was legitimatised by marriage. Thus the theory of Godwin's philosophical sect against marriage as an institution was finally disposed of. Godwin himself had married more than once, notwithstanding his opinions. Shelley, in honourable superiority to them, had married Harriet when she put herself in his power; but the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, already his unwedded companion, might have helped him to maintain his theoretical standard of superiority to all bonds of law, if ever woman could. The



pair, however, visionary as they were, followed the beaten way of law and order, against which they had rebelled, as soon as it was open to them ; and in this act the last spark of energy and meaning which remained in the lawless little band of sectarians died out. Sacred or not, the institution was too necessary, too expedient, to be rejected when the penalties of rebellion were fully realised.

Even in his grief for the catastrophe which swept poor Harriet out of his path, Shelley, it is said, maintained his innocence of all blame in respect to the poor girl who had thus taken her fate in her own hands. They were all pitifully young, which is almost their only excuse—that and their philosophy together. For youth is cruel, without meaning it, notwithstanding that it is easy of access to all emotions. Its own affairs bulk so largely, its own feelings preoccupy it so entirely, that it is hard to give due consideration, from any other point of view, to the obstacles in its way. A little later occurred an incident to which more importance has been attached by all Shelley's biographers and apologists than the death of poor Harriet. "Meanwhile," says Mr. Rossetti, the last of these defenders of the poet's memory, with fine irony, "a Chancery suit had been commenced to determine whether Mr. Percy Bysshe Shelley or Mr. Westbrook (Harriet's father) was the more proper person to elicit such intellectual or moral faculties, as the ruling power of the universe might have gifted the poet's two children with. In the eyes of a bandaged Justice the retired hotelkeeper proved to be clearly better fitted for this function than the author *in esse* of *Alastor* and *in posse* of the *Triumph of Life*." From this inflated statement of the case the reader will derive little real information. Harriet had left two children: one a little girl a year old at the time her husband forsook her, the other a boy born after their separation, and whom Shelley had never seen. The chil-

dren had lived with their grandfather all their little lives, and been supported by him ; and in the eyes of the ordinary spectator and of common equity, their father, who did not know them, who had never shown any interest in them, who had been the ultimate cause of their mother's wretched life and suicide, and who had just married that mother's supplanter, was evidently anything but a likely guardian of two innocent little mortals, between whom and himself there could be nothing but the mere formal bond of blood. Almost everybody who has mentioned the circumstance has represented it as a rending of the poet's heart, a cruel separation from his offspring ; and no event in domestic history has been more bitterly denounced, or with more passion. Yet these are the circumstances, plainly stated. In the case perhaps of no other pair living would a man's mistress, newly married to him on the death of his wife (which is the plain and brutal way of stating the circumstances), be considered a proper mother and guardian for that wife's daughter ; and it is ludicrous to speak of any real paternal feeling on the part of Shelley towards children whom he never seems to have even inquired about till this moment of conflict. It seems unlikely that any Judge would come to a different decision now than that which Lord Eldon has been devoted to all the infernal gods for pronouncing in 1817. Shelley had to make an allowance of £200, or some say £120 yearly, for the maintenance of the children, and never saw them after. Heaven and earth have rung with proclamations of the injustice of this decision : but it is hard to see in the circumstances wherein its cruelty lay. It half moved Byron to withhold *Don Juan* from the press, lest that publication might throw obstacles between himself and his child, should he ever be in a position to claim her ; but the motive was not powerful enough, though it was an effective thing to say.

At this time the Shelleys lived at Marlow, where the poet spent much of his time upon the river. It is a pleasure to the imagination to contemplate him out of all the vulgar strife and passionate hot complaints of injustice—to find him here quiet and in obvious ease, though he gave away his money wildly and lived an unthrifty life—floating about the kind and genial Thames, under the shadow of the Bisham woods, among the knotted tangles of the water weeds and floating lilies, his boat floating too in rhythmic leisure and gentle movement, noiseless with the flowing of the water, a soft accompaniment both to life and song. It was on some cliff of Bisham overlooking the river that the *Revolt of Islam* was chiefly written, and there is a wonderful appropriateness in the scene. Something like the flowing of a river is in its linked sweetness long drawn out, an endless gurgling of melodious verse. Time and space, and character and fact, and all limitations, float away as the poet sings his song. It is beautiful; it is heavenly sweet; it is vain as the blowing of the summer air which ruffles the foliage without motive, without meaning, yet is sweet as any sound in heaven or earth. Laon and Cythna are the ideal devoted pair who are to free their race from oppression; but what that race is, or how it is to be freed, no one can tell. The young hero is taken in his first effort and imprisoned high upon a mystic rock, where he has horrible visions. The maiden, escaping from a wonderful cavern under the sea, in which she too has been confined, takes his place and works a momentary victory through the women of the land; but, too magnanimous, they spare the tyrant, who lives to plot and plan and overthrow their work—and at the end perish together upon a great funeral pile, to which envy and fierce prejudice and bigotry drag them, on pretence that the sacrifice of the pair will propitiate Heaven and stop the pestilence. Here

indeed, they perish ; but next moment open their eyes upon a lovely landscape, and find themselves seated upon "the waved and golden sand of a clear pool," and are finally carried off in a pearly boat steered by a child angel, who turns out to be the child of which Cythna had become the mother in her cavern—to the island of the blessed. Nothing can be more vague and visionary than the story, or more musical than the manner of telling it. The reader who attempts to fathom what it means must wade through shallow oceans of sweetness till he is dazed with melody ; but even then will bring but little away. The landscape is like nothing human ; it is made up of every image of beauty that can be heard of or discovered ; and the revolutions that take place in bewildering succession are equally beyond the reach of the common understanding, which loses itself in the maze. As the two fair spirits disappear in the mystic boat, the river over which the poet's rapt eyes were gazing as he wove his song perhaps touches his mind for a moment, and, though with decorations unknown to Thames, steals into the concluding strain :—

"A scene of joy and wonder to behold,  
That river's shapes and shadows changing ever !  
When the broad sunrise filled with deepening gold  
Its whirlpools where all hues did spread and quiver,  
And where melodious falls did burst and shiver  
Among rocks clad with flowers, the foam and spray  
Sparkled like stars upon the sunny river,  
Or when the moonlight poured a holier day,  
One vast and glittering lake around green islands lay."

"Sometimes between the wide and flowering meadows,  
Mile after mile, we sailed, and 'twas delight  
To see far off the sunbeams chase the shadows  
Over the grass ; sometimes beneath the night  
Of wide and vaulted caves, whose roofs were bright  
With starry gems we fled, whilst from their deep  
And dark green chasms, shades beautiful and white,

Amid sweet sounds, across our path would sweep,  
Like swift and lovely dreams that walk the waves of sleep.

“ And ever as we sailed, our minds were full  
Of love and wisdom, which would overflow  
In converse wild, and sweet, and wonderful ;  
And in quick smiles whose light would come and go  
Like music o’er wide waves, and in the flow  
Of sudden tears, and in the mute caress—  
For a deep shade was cleft, and we did know  
That virtue, though obscured on Earth, not less  
Survives all mortal change in lasting loveliness.”

This stream of poetry is one which need never end ; it flows on, finding new images at every turn of the lingering unmeasured way. There is no need that anything should come of it ; that there should be incident, or moral, or even meaning. Shelley was always fond, even when his song reached a fuller music, of the “ did know,” “ did spread,” “ did burst,” which jar a little in the melody, but yet do not furnish discord enough to harm the cadence. The *Revolt of Islam* is the longest of all his poems, and the last which any but a student is likely to turn to now.

In 1818, Shelley and his family went to Italy, and among other wanderings the poet visited Venice and Lord Byron, renewing the friendship which had been begun on Lake Leman. Of this visit the poem called *Julian and Maddalo* was one of the results. It was not the first essay he had made in narrative poetry, which seems to have attracted him at this period of life, but it was a much higher flight than *Rosalind and Helen*, which preceded it. These two tales, if tales they can be called, stand alone in his poetry. Perhaps they were a conscious attempt in a new channel, perhaps the fruit of some suggestion ; but, whatever was the cause of their production, it is evident that this medium did not please him, and he returned to it no more. *Julian and Maddalo* is inter-

esting from the glimpse it gives us of the two poets in their second meeting. There is no record in verse of Byron's estimate of the companion and fellow-traveller of whom, at a moment of his life so important in his history, he had seen so much ; but there was a link of connection between them in the little person of the poor baby Allegra, Miss Clairmont's child, who in her infancy had been sent to her father in Venice, and who, happily for her, closed her existence in a very few years, and thus got rid of a maze of unhappy circumstances which must have overshadowed her bitterly enough had she lived. It was upon some business connected with this infant that Shelley went to Venice, and she, too, comes into the story. "Whilst I waited, with his child I played," the poet says—

"A lovelier toy sweet Nature never made,  
A serious, subtle, wild, yet gentle being,  
Graceful without design and unforeseeing,  
With eyes—oh speak not of her eyes !—which seem  
Twin mirrors of Italian heaven, yet gleam  
With such deep meaning, as we never see  
But in the human countenance : with me  
She was a special favourite, I had nursed  
Her fine and feeble limbs when she came first  
To this bleak world ; and she yet seemed to know  
On second sight her antient playfellow,  
Less changed than she was by six months or so."

It is, however, the description of Byron and the picture of one of his best known habits which is specially interesting, bringing before us the scene with all its enchantments, and the two poets in the central light, young and with so many of the richest gifts of nature, yet so little satisfied or happy :—

"I rode one evening with Count Maddalo  
Upon the bank of land which breaks the flow  
Of Adria towards Venice : a bare strand  
Of hillocks, heaped from ever-shifting sand,

Matted with thistles and amphibious weeds,  
Such as from earth's embrace the salt ooze breeds,

• • • • •  
This ride was my delight. I love all waste  
And solitary places ; where we taste  
The pleasure of believing what we see  
Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be :  
And such was this wide ocean, and this shore  
More barren than its billows ; and yet more  
Than all, with a remembered friend I love  
To ride as then I rode ;—for the winds drove  
The living spray along the sunny air  
Into our faces ; the blue heavens were bare,  
Stripped to the depths by the awakening north ;  
And, from the waves, sound like delight broke forth  
Harmonizing with solitude, and sent  
Into our hearts aerial merriment.  
So, as we rode, we talked ; and the swift thought,  
Winging itself with laughter, lingered not,  
But flew from brain to brain—such glee was ours,  
Charged with light memories of remembered hours,  
None slow enough for sadness : till we came  
Homeward, which always makes the spirit tame.

• • • • •  
Our talk grew somewhat serious, as may be  
Talk interrupted with such raillery  
As mocks itself, because it cannot scorn  
The thoughts it would extinguish :—'twas forlorn,  
Yet pleasing, such as once, so poets tell,  
The devils held within the dales of Hell  
Concerning God, freewill and destiny :  
Of all that earth has been or yet may be,  
All that vain men imagine or believe,  
Or hope can paint or suffering may achieve,  
We descanted, and I (for ever still  
Is it not wise to make the best of ill ?)  
Argued against despondency, but pride  
Made my companion take the darker side.  
The sense that he was greater than his kind  
Had struck, methinks, his eagle spirit blind  
By gazing on its own exceeding light."

The rest of the tale is supposed to illustrate the vanity

of Shelley's sanguine view of life, and the justice of the gloomier aspect under which it appeared to Byron. No doubt it is a real reminiscence of many a discussion of the kind, when Shelley, an eager optimist, ardent in easy plans of liberating nature, and still keeping a longing hold upon the gospel according to Godwin, met with the cynicism of the elder poet, the man worn with dissipation and many a downfall, and glad to attribute to fate and necessity the evils which he could not escape from. The description of Venice which follows is singularly beautiful, most finely touched in liquid clearness and light, in all its glow of sunset colour and quick-falling magical light.

This year and the two or three following were the climax of Shelley's genius, as indeed they were all that remained to live of his disturbed and unsettled life. He wrote in rapid succession his greatest poems one after the other—the *Prometheus*, in some respects the most perfect work of the age; the *Cenci*; the *Epipsychidion*, and many others. We are not aware of anything in the English language that can be fitly placed by the side of the great ideal drama, beautiful as a vision, glowing with imagery and song, yet great and imposing as the marbles of the gods, which came suddenly forth from amidst the Alastors and Laons, and their swamps and marshes of verse, and set itself at once in the high places above criticism. Something, no doubt, of the old perversity of the boyish Atheist, who was never content save when hurling defiance at the heavens, was in the poet's choice of the rebellious Titan, the god-defier and vanquisher, as his hero. Though it is but an official god that is to be dethroned, yet the idea is dear to him; and even in the aspect of imperial Jove, the cloud-compeller, the king of gods and men, there is nothing to conciliate the intellectual iconoclast, to whom the very idea of law and rule is obnoxious. But though this lurks in every line of the suffering Titan's challenge



and stern disdain of all his enemy can do, yet there is no commonplace blasphemy in the poem. Prometheus, upon his rock immovable, capable of nothing but suffering and constancy, cowing his victor even while he endures all the agonies that Jupiter sends, is a magnificent conception. He is comforted by the melancholy and dignified voice of the Earth, the great mother for whom he suffers, and by the softer pitying presence of Ione and Panthea, who sit by him through his vigil veiling their lovely faces in their wings, when the furies dart upon the silent sufferer and torture him; but yet Prometheus is alone, all-enduring, resolute as the rock on which he is bound. His figure rises with all the effect of a noble picture against the lurid sky, full of fiery and cruel light. "Ah me, alas! pain ever, for ever!" This opening overawes and absorbs even the reader least disposed to understand an ideal representation so far beyond and above the forces of humanity. The Thalabas and Kehamas, even the Manfreds and Cains, vanish before a conception so great, clothed in verse so melodious and noble. It is like nothing that had ever been seen before in the poetry of the north. There is a veil over our perfect understanding in many cases. The spirits and their voices, though beautiful, are confusing; they are too like each other, or our faculties lack clearness to keep the threads of being separate. In classic times, when the earth ran over with visionary life, and wild and lovely intellectual creatures lurked in every brook and every tree, character and individuality had not begun to be needful. This is the greatest drawback to the modern mind in comprehending the visions of classical antiquity, or rather those modern adaptations of them, in which a consciousness of this difficulty always lurks. But the group of Prometheus commends itself to the eye as well as to the ear. It is cut out for us as in living marble, and the high and noble

verse in which the heroic Titan utters his soul seldom falls below the tragic dignity of the situation. On the other hand, the sweetness and devotion of the great woman-spirit remind us more of the theories of those religious enthusiasts who believe in divine duality and a mother-God than of the mere softnesses of the classic nymphs. Asia has the greatness and power which become a divinity: and even her sister-spirits are above the dimensions of the human. These grand outlines are somewhat vague; they are too little concise, too unlimited in speech, for even the ideal drama. Indeed, there is scarcely a single dramatic element in the great Mystery, as it rises slowly amid ethereal music, with one great voice pealing by times in stately sweetness above all artifices of oratory, between us and the skies. This is the part of the poem which, to our thinking, is the greatest; but its lyrics still stand unrivalled in the language. Sometimes there is a touch in them of the quaint and delightful no-meaning of some of Shakspeare's snatches of spirit-song, but in most cases the lovely melody still retains a thread of intellectual power, and the soft cadences as they fall carry an echo of thought. To compare them with the hymn-book choruses of *Manfred* would be to throw into almost ludicrous light the *banalité* and laborious matter-of-fact of those productions. The song of Asia, so often quoted, conveys so true a picture of the character of Shelley's poetry altogether, and its effect upon the sympathetic reader, that we extract it, not so much as an example of beautiful verse as for the description it contains:—

“ My soul is an enchanted boat,  
Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float  
Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing;  
And thine doth like an angel sit  
Beside the helm conducting it,  
Whilst all the winds with melody are ringing  
It seems to float, ever, for ever,

Upon that many-winding river,  
Between mountains, woods, abysses,  
A paradise of wildernesses,  
Till, like one in slumber bound,  
Borne to the ocean, I float down, around,  
Into a sea profound, of ever-spreading sound.  
Meanwhile thy spirit lifts its pinions  
In music's most serene dominions,  
Catching the winds that fan that happy heaven;  
And we sail on, away, afar,  
Without a course, without a star,  
But by the instinct of sweet music driven,  
Till through Elysian garden islets,  
By thee most beautiful of pilots,  
Where never mortal pinnacle glided,  
The boat of my desire is guided."

"This poem," Shelley says, in prose almost as ornate as his poetry, "was chiefly written upon the mountainous ruins of the Baths of Caracalla, among the flowery glades and thickets of odoriferous blossoming trees, which are extended in many widening labyrinths upon its immense platforms and dizzy arches suspended in the air. The bright blue sky of Rome, and the effect of the vigorous awakening spring in that divinest climate, and the new life with which it drenches the spirit to intoxication, were the inspiration of the drama." Unless it had been written in the groves of Ida, on the slopes of Olympus, it could not have had a more fitting scene.

This great work was followed at a short interval by the terrible and impassioned drama of the *Cenci*. That Shelley should have chosen so horrible a story shows how curiously his musical genius and tender soul were disposed towards the most fantastic and incredible glooms of imagination. He could not bear to see or think of pain, but his mind had an unnatural pleasure in horrors which are beyond the common range of criminality altogether, and cruelties too black for merely human conception. There is something in the primitive simplicity and abso-

lutism of such a nature, rejecting all modifications, and dealing only with first principles, which makes it compatible with the most sensitive gentleness to impute the fiercest capabilities of crime to those who disagree with it. No Puritan had ever a keener vein of bigotry in him. He would not have burned or beheaded, but he did worse : he thought the enemies of freedom and of free thought were capable of pursuing himself relentlessly, and attempting his assassination in real life : and in poetry it was his pleasure to imagine, as easy and delightful to the minds he hated, such unnatural crimes as make the hair stand upright on our heads. Probably he believed, in all sincerity, that a worshipper of the God whom he regarded as cruel and merciless, the God of punishment and wrath, He who commanded the destruction of the Canaanites and the slaying of Agag, was capable of any monstrous outrage upon human nature. In pursuance of this wild theory he makes the hideous reprobate Cenci, not a mocker or false believer, but pious after a fashion, imploring God's curse upon his knees, and believing it will come. Besides this polemical impulse, which never deserted him, his mind had a natural inclination towards extremes. The contrasts which he preferred were dark-nesses as of hell in alternation with the sunny noonday—not mere passing clouds and vapours. No doubt it was those natural tendencies which made the most revolting of historical incidents attract him. The pain and freezing horror of it will keep the drama of the *Cenci* from ever being popular ; but few readers will have any difficulty in granting the claim made by Shelley's disciples, that it is the finest tragedy of the age. To tell the truth, this is not saying much, for the age was poor in dramatic art, as England has continued to be.

But there is nothing poor or feeble in this wonderful production. It is totally unlike anything that Shelley

produced either before or after. The self-restraint which banished from its nervous dialogues so much of his natural exuberance of detail and imagery, shows a power with which we should not have credited him but for this example, and nothing in his previous work could have prepared the reader for the distinctness of conception, such as it is, with which these terrible figures are framed. It would be hard to say they are natural; there is little humanity in them; but the extraordinary image of the father burns against the background with a diabolical force and determination which is indescribable. We know of no such bad man in all poetry. Shakspeare's Richard holds a very different position in the world of imagination; he is curiously fashioned, shadowed out and rounded against the troubled scene with all his subtle gifts, his specious arguments, and fine pretences. But Cenci is unprovided with any of these gradations. He has not even the excuse of a great ambition. His ghastly triumph in the news that his sons are dead has no sufficient purpose; nor has the worse outrage upon his daughter. It is evil for evil's sake that he gloats in, and derives a fell enjoyment from, and the highest gratification he anticipates is working such utter debasement of soul in his victims, that the crime he forces them into will become an inspiration to them also. Cenci himself has never known what innocence was. His early friend has no recollection of him save one of wickedness:—

“ I stood beside your dark and fiery youth,  
Watching its bad and bold career, as men  
Watch meteors; but it vanished not. I marked  
Your desperate and remorseless manhood: now  
Do I behold you, in dishonoured age,  
Charged with a thousand unrepented crimes.”

Such a creation can scarcely be called human: it is the symbol of guilt which pleases the primitive mind,

without relentings, without complication, all bad and black and absolute ; but it has a hideous ideality and life. Beatrice, on the other hand, resembles little the sad, half-childish half-heroic martyr of Guido's picture, which in its wonderful anguish of spent tears and exhausted hope, is one of the most touching images Art has handed down to us, and one of the best known. The outraged heroine of Shelley is a far more passionate and powerful spirit. There are no softenings in her, no shrinking from the vengeance, which her unimaginable wrong demands. And indeed the mistake in her is, that she is too strong to make it possible for us to believe in the outrage at all. Such a woman would have resisted to the death, and would not have been overcome. This is the flaw in the conception, the failure which the reader feels in spite of himself. Her proud and fiery spirit, however, is no type of excellence, but bears the oil in it of being Cenci's daughter. The scene in which she overawes the actual murderer, and forces him, by the power of her constraining eyes and indignant eloquent address, to withdraw the confession extorted by the rack, and (falsely) to declare her innocent, is fine and exciting, but degrades Beatrice from any ideal eminence. The only expedient for a heroic woman in such circumstances would have been to stand strongly upon the justice of her cause and vindicate her act. She might have been moved by the impulse of self-defence at first, and faltered ; but in cold blood could never have sent her tool to death with a lie on his lips. Putting aside these defects, however, all that she says is poured forth with noble fire and energy. Beside her all the other personages of the drama grow pale—the shrinking attendants, the gentle Lucretia, the vacillating Giacomo, the deceitful Orsino, are weak and ghost-like : but her mien is ever grand, and her utterances powerful. The *Cenci* stands by itself in the intensity of its gloom and passion ; a work to be read once

with excitement and awe, but which the general reader would be little apt, for his own pleasure, to turn to again. It is far more like the Greek drama in the unity of its single purpose and movement than the rich and irregular variety of Shakspeare. Shelley was of the former, not the latter world. His sympathies with men were all theoretical; he had no brotherly insight into their ways, or appreciation of their wants, though he would have bought justice for them and freedom, according to his conception, with his blood—or anybody else's. But his world was the absolute, not the real. Sometimes this raised his poetry into a confused but lovely empyrean far above the comprehension of the general; but sometimes, too, led him to failure, and to substitute a lower creation for a higher, as in the case of Beatrice, who, such as she is, a pale and terrible figure, stands distinct against the poetical firmament with an altitude and bearing entirely her own.

Among the poems which followed there are several of which it is very difficult to speak. Such strange yet beautiful rhapsodies as *Epipsychidion* and the *Witch of Atlas* defy all the comments of the critic. The former is a strain of impassioned love addressed to "a beautiful soul," the noble Italian lady who would seem to have inspired Shelley with a spiritual passion. Whether it were only spiritual, it is needless to inquire. The language of passion is always subject to mistaken interpretation; but the reader can scarcely help reflecting that the bond of marriage, which neither husband nor wife thought necessary, was a very useful safeguard to Shelley and Mary. So far as a meaning can be traced through the sweet wilderness of verse, the poet would seem to identify in his Emilia the ideal which he has been pursuing all his life—the one perfect woman of his dreams. Their opportunities of meeting were few; but their letters were of the most impassioned description,

and this poem is one long hymn of adoration to the "Spouse! sister! angel!" "too late beloved, too soon adored," whom he describes as the "Pilot of the fate whose course has been so starless." The passion in the poem, however, is too abstract to offend the most sensitively moral, and it is beautiful as running water, or the sound of his own *West Wind*, or any other inarticulate melody. Amid its indistinct loveliness, however, here is one curious little passage, which shows the confusion of Shelley's own mind as to ordinary human ties:—

"I never thought before my death to see  
Youth's vision thus made perfect. Emily,  
I love thee; though the world by no thin name  
Will hide that love, from its unvalued shame.  
Would we two had been twins of the same mother!  
Or, that the name my heart lent to another  
Could be a sister's bond for her and thee,  
Blending two beams of one eternity!  
Yet were one lawful and the other true,  
These names, though dear, could paint not, as is due,  
How beyond refuge I am thine. Ah me!  
I am not thine: I am a part of thee."

There must have been no inconsiderable heartache among the little group at Pisa, however it was distributed, when these lines were written; although, perhaps, in the fragmentary lyrics of the poet's last days there was matter still more dangerous; but we need not inquire into the sentiments which save in these beautiful verses have left no other record. Love, even when expressed in the loveliest poetry, is less lovely when it breathes forth devotion to a number of adored objects. The *Witch of Atlas* is more mysterious still than the anthem of passion which is inscribed to Emilia Viviani. There are readers who will understand—or at least who will be so carried along the stream of poetry, like Asia in her enchanted boat, that they will seem to understand these beautiful



utterances of mystery ; but no critic could define them, and it is unnecessary to add anything to the many expressions of admiring bewilderment which already exist. Other poems of varying beauty and splendour we must be satisfied to name in the same way—the *Triumph of Life*, a fine unfinished allegorical dream, the confused dramatic sketch called *Hellas*, and many more. In *Adonais*, which is an elegy to the memory of young Keats, just dead in Rome—the *avant-courier* preceding into the unseen this young and brilliant group of short-lived poets—we have the thread of meaning which many of the other productions of this period want so much. Shelley was not, according to his letters, so great an admirer of Keats as he seems in his verse ; but his indignant spirit had been roused by the common idea of the time, that the poor young poet was the victim of a review—

“ And that the soul, that very fiery particle,  
Had let itself be snuffed out by an article,”

as Byron says, with somewhat cruel levity. This idea fired the revolutionary, to whom critics were but another kind of tyrants oppressing the free-born, and in the flame and fire of his sudden partisanship and wild grief over the slaughtered, this poem was written. It is worthy of a more perfect inspiration. If it has not the succinct splendour of *Lycidas*, it counts next after that wonderful lament, and is a fitting and noble monument to the young poet. Though it was somewhat hard to assail a harmless reviewer as “a deaf and viperous murderer,” and though the foundation of all this scathing denunciation was a mistake, yet the verses which enshrine the memory of that gifted boy are as beautiful as if they had sprung from pure love and sorrow :—

“ Peace, peace ! he is not dead, he doth not sleep—  
He hath awakened from the dream of life—

'Tis we, who lost in stormy visions, keep  
 With phantoms an unprofitable strife,  
 And in mad trance, strike with our spirit's knife  
 Invulnerable nothings.—*We* decay  
 Like corpses in a charnel ; fear and grief  
 Convulse us and consume us day by day,  
 And cold hopes swarm like worms within our living clay

“ He has outsoared the shadow of our night ;  
 Envy and calumny and hate and pain,  
 And that unrest which men miscall delight,  
 Can touch him not and torture not again ;  
 From the contagion of the world's slow stain  
 He is secure, and now can never mourn  
 A heart grown cold, a head grown grey in vain ;  
 Nor, when the spirit's self has ceased to burn,  
 With sparkless ashes load an unlamented urn.

“ He lives, he wakes—'tis Death is dead, not he ;  
 Mourn not for Adonais.—Thou young Dawn  
 Turn all thy dew to splendour, for from thee  
 The spirit thou lamentest is not gone ;  
 Ye caverns and ye forests, cease to moan !  
 Cease ye faint flowers and fountains, and thou Air  
 Which like a mourning veil thy scarf hadst thrown  
 O'er the abandoned Earth, now leave it bare  
 Even to the joyous stars which smile on its despair !

“ He is made one with Nature : there is heard  
 His voice in all her music, from the moan  
 Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird ;  
 He is a presence to be felt and known  
 In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,  
 Spreading itself where'er that Power may move  
 Which has withdrawn his being to its own ;  
 Which wields the world with never wearied love,  
 Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above.”

These lines do not sound much like the production of one who had signed himself “Atheist” in the levity of a traveller's book, and on every more serious occasion when an opportunity was offered him ; but it does not seem that Shelley doubted immortality, though he doubted God : and poetical ethics are always vague. “ That

Power which wields the world with never-wearied love" is the hardest of all things to keep out of true poetry, which, in its very nature and essence, turns towards the divine, whatever its possessor may think or say.

There remains to notice only that portion of Shelley's poetry which is his most indisputable title to fame—those lovely little lyrics which are dear to all. If Shelley's productions were all swept out of the world except those which are preserved in Mr. Palgrave's admirable little book, the *Golden Treasury*, we doubt much whether the loss would seriously or generally affect his claims to immortality. The *Ode to the West Wind*, the *Skylark*, the *Spirit of Delight*, the *Lines written at Naples*—"in dejection," as the title goes—those which were composed among the Euganean Hills, and many a nameless snatch of song, breathing infinite suggestions of melody and thought, are, of all he has left us, the most dear to the common heart. Fanatics may prize Shelley's mystic utterances, and students do their best to fathom them for ages, without making the least impression upon the wider human audience; but the heart and the ear which are closed to the charm of these shorter lyrics are dull indeed, and unworthy the effort of a poet; the memory is unfurnished in which they do not lurk to sweeten solitude and give expression to many a wistful thought and dreamy fancy. Some of them embody the very soul of pensive thoughtfulness:—

" We look before and after,  
And pine for what is not ;  
Our sincerest laughter  
With some pain is fraught—  
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought."

It is hopeless to attempt to indicate one after another these beautiful songs of the imagination and heart; the reader wants no guide nor introduction here.

The life Shelley spent in Italy in these fertile and abundant years was full of friends, and though also full of agitations, would seem to have had its share of happiness. The curious correspondence which is to be found in the volume, published since these pages were written, of Southey's letters to Caroline Bowles, comes in strangely in interruption of the softer record. It seems almost cruel to remind so irresponsible a being as Shelley, once he had escaped the atmosphere of real life which, more or less, is always to be found in England, of the tragedy of poor Harriet and the misadventures of his early life, as Southey does with a stern virtue which, in any other circumstances, we should approve. The elder poet did not know how soon the inexorable shadows were to close round that young and visionary life, which at all times had played with its existence, nor ever fathomed the real meaning of the phantasmagoria with which it surrounded itself. But as a matter of fact, we do not love Shelley the less for his old friend's somewhat pitiless indictment. We cannot think of him indeed, with our knowledge of all that was going to happen, without so pitiful a sense of approaching fate, that our forgiveness of all his vagaries is secured beforehand. And yet it is difficult to blame Southey, who was right also from his point of view; and sadly disappointed besides in the youth whom he had loved and considered in the shortsightedness of man as another self, whom he could understand and help over his difficulties. This little episode of severe condemnation comes like the visit of a gloomy seer, alarming in momentary solemnity, yet soon got over, into the records of the little Italian coterie, where all was wild and astray, yet full of enjoyment and of the pleasurable yet sometimes almost tragic inquietude of youthful life.

In 1821 Shelley went to Ravenna to visit Byron, and induced him to join the little company of friends at Pisa.

One consequence of this renewed intercourse was an invitation sent to Leigh Hunt, a poor man with a family of children and a sick wife, who had been one of Shelley's warmest friends in his early days in London, and to whom he had already done innumerable kindnesses, to come to Italy, for the purpose of joining Byron and himself in a literary enterprise, the idea of which they had struck out between them. It is difficult to disentangle the rights of this story from the three or four versions of it which are given by the different actors in the transaction. By one we are told it was Byron's idea; by another that the suggestion was first made by Shelley, with a view to benefit Leigh Hunt; by Leigh Hunt himself, that it was to be a joint undertaking, Lord Byron being the originator of the scheme: and by Byron, that he was himself drawn (we think he does not hesitate to say inveigled) into it by the brothers Hunt for their own profit. This is one of the literary misunderstandings which are most unpleasant to read of and least edifying to investigate. The plan was to start a quarterly review or magazine, to be called the *Liberal*, and published in London, though written in Italy, and which was to afford a medium for the poems and speculations and ideas of the poetical brotherhood and their retainers. Shelley seems to have had but little to do with the scheme, but it was he who invited with eager kindness the friend whom he had already served so often, and with whom and his family both Mary and he were on the most intimate and cordial terms. The Shelleys and their friends, Captain Williams and his wife, with whom they formed almost one household, had gone to the village of Larici, on the eastern Riviera, for their summer quarters, when the Cockney poet and journalist arrived, after a long and miserable voyage, at Leghorn. Shelley and Williams had a short time before been made happy by the acquisition of a pleasure boat, "a small

schooner," which they called the *Don Juan*, and in which they had sailed about those happy coasts like two school-boys, full of delight in their new toy, through May and June, in the lovely Italian summer, rash and joyous, with one sailor boy for their crew, and all the temerity of ignorance. The two set out "in high spirits" in their little cockleshell, coasting along the most beautiful shore in the world, to busy Leghorn, to meet the stranger—whom Shelley installed in his own house at Pisa, and welcomed with enthusiastic kindness. After a few days' delay to see his friends established, and renew the talks and confidences of old, Shelley and his companion set out together in their boat, to return to their temporary home. The description given by Captain Trelawney, one of the members of this intimate society, of the evening on which they set sail, reads almost like a bit out of one of the many narratives of imaginary voyages which Shelley delighted in. Just so would he have painted the fatal evening on which Alastor or Laon, the heroes of his youth, set out to meet an evident fate.

"It was almost dark, though only half-past six," Trelawney says; "the sea was of the colour, and looked as solid and smooth as a sheet of lead, and covered with an oily scum. Gusts of wind swept over without ruffling it, and big drops of rain fell on its surface, rebounding as if they could not penetrate it. There was a commotion in the air, made up of many threatening sounds coming upon us from the sea. Fishing craft and coasting vessels, under bare poles, rushed by us in shoals, running foul of the ships in the harbour. As yet the din and hubbub were that made by man; but their shrill pipings were suddenly silenced by the crashing voice of a thunder-squall that burst right over our heads. For some time no other sounds were to be heard than the thunder, wind, and rain. When the fury of the storm, which did not last for more than twenty minutes, was in some degree cleared, I looked to seaward anxiously, in the hope of deservying Shelley's boat——"

But the reader knows that in that blast Shelley's wayward, beautiful, and wealthy genius, not yet fully de-

veloped, had taken flight, and was lost to all mortal mediums of communication for evermore.

Strange stories are told of supernatural warnings and intimations which had been made to him during that early summer, of impending fate. He saw, or thought he saw, the appearance of the little Allegra, who had died a few weeks before in her Venetian convent, rise out of the sea, and smiling, clap her hands at the sight of him. He had been called from his bed by a cloaked figure, which, leading him into another room, threw back its hood and disclosed his own features. On another occasion some of his friends saw Shelley, to all appearance, walking near them, when he was certainly in another place; as Sir Robert Peel is said to have seen Byron in London streets, when he was in Venice. Those curious indications of instinctive faith in the supernatural seem strange in a man who had so gloried in his unbelief—but to be sure it was God, and especially the Christian God, whom he disbelieved, and not the unseen. What is perhaps more extraordinary is the constant disappearance in a boat of all the creatures of his fancy. Generally it is a dream river up which they thread their course as they disappear from mortal sight; but whether it be death or translation, this is always the medium. In his own case it was the quickly excited, soon allayed *tourment* of that soft Italian sea, by which he made an instantaneous transition from warm, youth, and life, and poetry, and friendship, into the unknown.

It is unnecessary to linger upon the oft-told tale of the burning of the recovered bodies, when weeks after the sea gave up its dead. It was said at first that those funeral rites were exacted by the authorities, but this does not seem to have been the case, and the high-flown ultra-poetical spectacle was evidently the suggestion of some one among the excited band of young men, distracted

by the shock and horror of the sudden catastrophe, yet not without a certain theatrical sense that their heathen rites were the finest tribute that could be paid to the poet. Leigh Hunt gives a painful picture of a scene which was too much for the highly strained nerves of spectators so sensitive and excitable. He relates how Byron and himself fell into wild mirth as they drove away, with that flame still scorching their eyes, and their souls harrowed by the unprecedented sight; they laughed and shouted to the reproachful night in the wild half madness of pain, trying to forget the horror of it. Thus, by sea and by fire, what had been Shelley was scattered to the elements, of which his eager tremulous nature, his soul alit with wandering lights, his wild rebellious spirit, his tender heart, and the poetry which embodied every tone of natural music and every strange turn and twist of spiritual caprice, might have been framed.

The connection between Lord Byron and Leigh Hunt was short-lived, and in every way unhappy. In all the letters of the former he makes it appear that his connection with Hunt and his periodical was not of his seeking, an impression which seems to be quite contrary to the facts of the case; but it was a painful position for both—the friend who united them being thus snatched from between them a few days after the arrival of the poor and harassed man of letters, whose faithful friend Shelley had been for so long. The *Liberal* failed completely, notwithstanding the publication in it of Byron's *Vision of Judgment*, and other poems by his hand: and of all that Leigh Hunt himself could do—and though an unthrifty man, he was never unpopular as a writer. But Byron, too, was now at the end of his poetical career. He had poured forth his soul in various ways, and in many an unaccustomed channel; he had ranged over the whole gamut of poetical utterance, from the dialogues of the loftiest angels



to the rattle of *mondain* commentary, modern politics, and scandal, and he had not in any found the satisfaction for which his soul craved. He believed that his popularity in England was forsaking him, and the universal voice of criticism which had been raised against the immorality of *Don Juan* had, even while it flattered, shaken deeply a mind which, though rashly self-willed and venturesome, never had any real confidence in itself. That the public had sustained a shock in its fidelity to a poet who, notwithstanding moral disapproval and all the social persecution which he supposed he had been subjected to, had secured above any other its steadfast allegiance, seems to be proved by the fact that his *Vision of Judgment*, the fierce satire with which he annihilated Southey, found no publisher, and had to see the light in the *Liberal*, along with the tedious translations from Pulci in which he took a perverse pleasure. All this quickened the discontent, the restless desire for some new excitement—or nobler determination to make a new beginning and do something in the world of more actual effect than poetry—which was fermenting in his mind. “If I live ten years longer, you will see that it is not over with me—I don’t mean in literature, for that is nothing—but you will see that I shall do something, the times and fortune permitting, that, like the cosmogony of the world, will puzzle the philosophers of all nations,” he writes. And it was now that those proposals were made to him by the committee of Greek sympathisers in London which decided his fate.

Here seemed, indeed, the new opportunity he wanted. Byron had little sympathy with those who were his immediate social inferiors at any time. From the day when a schoolboy at Harrow he protested against the flogging of a comrade because he was a lord, till his latest breath, a love of peerages and titles which goes the length of

vulgarity, and which makes the great poet in certain phases cruelly resemble the British snob, that revelation of modern genius, had been strong in him. But this did not interfere with a practical liking for "the people" as represented by servants and dependants, and a theoretical interest in the emancipation of oppressed countries, and the restoration of freedom to such classic races as the Italians and Greeks, both of which were then under the yoke of other powers. He had joined the Carbonari some time before, and had gone through an interval of anxious expectation, looking for a rising, and fully disposed to lend his aid in every way to the hoped-for revolution. That project had come to nothing; but the time seemed to be ripe for the deliverance of the Greeks, and every generous impulse was in favour of that race, from which all our traditions of art and poetry and wisdom have come. Weary of all things, and disgusted with most, seeing, as he thought, his very fame slip from him, with some real enthusiasm for the cause and an eager desire for a new opportunity of distinguishing himself, Byron threw himself into this romantic expedition. He went out like a new crusader to conquer and set free the sacred lands of poetry and freedom. All that was in him, both good and bad, was roused for this undertaking. It was a great, noble, romantic enterprise, worthy of his rank, and transferring to another and, he thought, more splendid sphere the superiority which his genius had achieved: and there was at the same time a touch of melodrama in it which pleased the other part of him, the weaker part of the author of the *Corsair*. It is needless to enter into the sad tale. He went away in a kind of masquerade of greatness on which approaching fate and genius throw to us nowadays a dignifying solemnity, notwithstanding the mock heroics that were in it. But his constitution was broken and his days numbered, and after a most distress-

ing illness, mismanaged and miserable in every way, he died at Missolonghi in April 1824, about two years after the scarcely more sad catastrophe which ended the life of Shelley. His last words, inarticulate and not understood, indirectly concerned the tragedy of his life; the names of his child, his wife, and sister, were made out by his distracted attendant, without anything more of the final explanations or last messages which his spirit, confused among the mists of death, intended to send to them. And thus, in loneliness and trouble and sorrow, this being so wonderfully endowed, and who might have had so glorious a career, passed away into the darkness. A more sad conclusion could not have been imagined. On his thirty-sixth birthday, which occurred less than three months before, he had written some verses, not on his highest level, but with something of the same sentimental-romantic cast to which he had given vent at the greatest crisis of his life, anticipating for himself "a soldier's grave." But even this was not granted to his ambition, and all that he could do for Greece was to soothe in some degree intestine clamours and sacrifice a great deal of money. No outburst of new power, no blaze of new fame, was permitted to the tried spirit to make up for the failure of its life.

Thus ended the second group of the poets who were the glory of the generation preceding our own, and who formed with their elder brethren such an epoch of literary greatness as has seldom crossed the severer path of history. The young Keats, of whom we have yet to give an account, and whose connection with this greater pair is accidental more than real, had glided out of the world before them, like a pale herald or page to announce the coming of the princes. The elder men who had preceded them in the world of letters, and lent them, if not inspiration, at least the genial suggestion which woke their individual voices, outlived them long, seeing them rise

and fall like meteors. We will not attempt to make any further comparison between the two bands of poets; they were essentially different in genius, and bore up each a separate side of that poetic crown which, next to the Shakspearian, distinguishes this age as the greatest in the history of our language. It is a favourite pursuit with many students of history to trace the high tides of intellectual energy to the immense stimulation of such a political event, for instance, as the French Revolution, and much has been said of the effect of that extraordinary crisis in human affairs upon the development of so great a school of poetry in England. But we are unable ourselves to see the connection, so far as the earlier group is concerned. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, and the lesser minds who were connected with them, felt, indeed, the momentary influence which a great contemporary event must inevitably exercise upon sensitive spirits; but their minds were cast in an entirely different mould, and save that Wordsworth probably got from his Revolution experiences, the fine theory which runs through much of his poetry, as to the uses of misery and suffering, and their beneficial, if painful, agency on the world, it is impossible to point to any effect which the convulsions of political life had upon them. But Byron and Shelley were the children of the Revolution. The spirit of wild discontent on one side and wilder visionary longing for a new system and form of life on the other had got into their veins. Obedience, discipline, and order, and all the established sanctities of home and family, of law and government, were to them tyrannical prejudices of the past. Their minds were restless all their life long with that fever which they had sucked in at their birth, which so many secondary circumstances account for, yet which may well be believed to have taken its origin from the wild ferment in the air, the hot and fiery commotion, the blood and

flames that reddened earth when those angels of divination, confused yet receptive, first lighted upon it and took their earliest survey of its affairs through wondering childish eyes. They did not know what they would be at, any more than the populace did which found a vent for its blind misery in spreading the like around it, and exacted a wild vicarious atonement indiscriminately from the innocent, for the wrongs done by the guilty. To both these uneasy souls the conditions of Revolution lasted all their lives long: they never got out of that fatal atmosphere. Wildly rejecting all guidance, without leader or following to steady them upon their way, they had but their own uncertain instincts, their own wild impulses, to guide them; and to glorify these impulses, and make of them the only divine guides, was the object, so far as they had an object, of much of their poetry and of the greater part of their lives. Even what they loved became repulsive to them when it was associated with the idea of duty. The fantastic freedom of a classic Faun, to roam where it would, to enjoy as it would, to dart away at every impulse, was in Shelley's ethereal nature, only half human and altogether irresponsible: though his intellect tangled him in theories of political justice, in fantastic schemes for the amelioration of the race, and his child's heart of pity and tenderness made him incapable of denying kindness or help to any suppliant—save those who had a lawful claim upon his service. Byron was of the earth earthy—a totally different kind of being. He did not stand upon the right of doing wrong, like his companion spirit; he followed the law of his appetites and senses, without any doubt on the point that it was bad to do so, but a braggart's pleasure in the badness, as a proof of his courage and power of rebellion against heaven itself, which he was never unwilling to appease privately by acknowledgment of his insubordination. His was in every

way the lower side of the great rebellion. He had all the restless uneasiness, all the sense of a world out of joint, of wrongs to be avenged, and bitter opposition to all authorities and exactions of duty; but he was a cynic where Shelley was an enthusiast, and hoped nothing from the race, to which, notwithstanding he too showed a contemptuous prodigal pity when any individual pang came under his eyes.

Peace to their troubled spirits! The heart bleeds to contemplate them, so young, so full of noble gifts, dropped so early out of all operation of those experiences of life which might have brought a higher development and perhaps a nobler element of tranquillity and satisfaction into their lives. We are far from believing in such waste of genius as that their noble faculties are lost. By this time, perhaps—who can tell?—these changed and perfected voices, in fullest harmony and measure, are preparing for us the songs to be sung in heaven.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY, born 1792; died 1822.

Published Zastrozzi and St. Irvyne before 1810 (*h.*)

Printed for private circulation, Queen Mab, 1813.

Published Alastor, 1816.

The Revolt of Islam, 1817.

Rosalind and Helen, 1819.

Prometheus Unbound, 1820.

Cenci, 1820.

Epipsychidion, 1821.

Hellas, 1821.

Julian and Maddalo (published after his death), 1824.

The Witch of Atlas, posthumous.

Adonais.

Smaller poems.

Many fragments in prose, unpublished.

Other fragments to be found in the *Essays, Letters, etc.*, edited by Mrs. Shelley; and in the *Shelley Memorials*, edited by Lady Shelley.

**GEORGE GORDON BYRON**, born 1788 ; died 1824.

**Published Songs of Idleness**, 1807.

**English Bards and Scotch Reviewers**, 1809.

**Childe Harold**, Cantos I. and II., 1812.

**The Giaour**, 1813.

**The Bride of Abydos**, 1813.

**Corsair**, 1814.

**Lara** (published with Rogers's *Jacqueline*), 1814.

**Hebrew Melodies**, 1815 (?).

**Siege of Corinth**, 1816.

**Parisina**, 1816.

**Childe Harold**, Canto III., and **Prisoner of Chillon**, 1816.

**Manfred**, 1817.

**Don Juan**, Cantos I. and II., 1819.

**Marino Faliero**, 1820 (?).

**Don Juan**, Cantos III. IV V., 1821.

**Caïn**, 1822.

**Don Juan**, Cantos VI. VII. VIII., 1822.

    "      "      "      IX. X. XI., 1823.

    "      "      "      XII. XIII. XIV., 1823.

    "      "      "      XV. XVI., 1824.

**Two Foscari**.

**Sardanapalus**.

**Hebrew Melodies**.

**The Dream**.

**Short Poems**.

**Heaven and Earth**.

## CHAPTER IV.

## JOHN KEATS.

THE youngest of this young group, connected with Shelley by natural links of congenial spirit and temperament, as well as by some actual acquaintance and kindness, but fiercely thrust aside and disowned by Byron, cannot be dissociated from their larger and, young though they were, maturer figures. The distance between twenty-four and thirty is not very much in years, but it makes a marvellous difference in development, and even to Shelley Keats was not much more than a boy full of ambition and promise. John Keats was born in 1795, and was consequently three years younger than Shelley, and seven years younger than Byron. He was not like them, born, as people say, "a gentleman," but belonged to that middle class which, in those days, kept itself much more closely within its own boundaries, and did not invade the high places as now. His family had much respectability and a little money, but the parents both died early, leaving their children to the care of strangers, and bequeathing a delicate constitution to two at least of their sons. One of his brothers died at a still younger age than the poet, and he himself seems to have been always a delicate youth, accustomed to much care and anxiety about his health. "The publication of three small volumes of verse, some earnest friendships, one profound passion, and a premature death,"



are, as his kind and sympathetic biographer, Lord Houghton, touchingly says, "the only incidents in his career." His poems, though they have held their ground from that time to this, are more preludes and overtures in poetry than anything else, and he had little time to show what manhood was in him, and had not that command of money and leisure which enabled his contemporaries to emancipate themselves from the ordinary bonds of life. Byron was a ruined peer, and Shelley a rich man's prodigal son: but even the poverty of wealth is better than the well-to-do-ness of the humble, and confers a certain fine superiority to fate. Keats was in no way superior to fate. His friendship with Leigh Hunt brought him within the little literary coterie of which that gentle journalist was the head: and he had met Shelley in its little assemblies, where poetry was the great subject, and the neophytes babbled perpetually of green fields. The epithet of the Cockney school bestowed upon this band by the sharp-tongued critics, was not without reason, for Leigh Hunt's enthusiasm for everything that was green and growing has a tone of exaggeration in it which sounds like that of a man whose garden was a flower-box in a window, and his extravagances of furnishing and decoration—though far enough, no doubt, from what a minor poet would think necessary now—afforded contemptuous amusement to the stalwart writers of the Blackwood school. No doubt this pale youth, with his angelic blue eyes and long hair, flitted out and in of that lower circle of society in London which we have attempted to indicate. He attended Hazlitt's lectures on the poets, and wrote long letters about them to his friends, several of whom were poets like himself, as they all thought in those days,—but not like Keats as it turned out:—and he had the freedom of Haydon's studio, who was then a rising painter, with, as everybody thought, all the world before him, to

whom even Wordsworth, as well as the younger fry, addressed sonnets. The occupation of young Keats in those days was that of a medical student, and he seems to have gone manfully through the preliminary work of the profession to which he was destined, though it revolted him, as may be easily imagined. To thrust a worshipper of beauty such as he was, while still so young and always so sensitive, into the dark revelations of disease and the horrors of anatomy, must have been to subject him to an ordeal almost unendurable: and all the advantage his studies eventually gave him was the painful enlightenment by which he could decide on his own case, and foresee the inevitable end of his first attack of illness. But poetry and perpetual poetical communion with so many who were like-minded sweetened his uncongenial toil. Once, it is said, he met Coleridge while walking with Leigh Hunt, no doubt in one of the suburban lanes between Hampstead and Highgate. After a little cursory talk, during which, probably, the modest stripling stood silent, they parted: but a minute after, Keats, his enthusiasm bursting through his shyness, rushed back to beg that he might shake hands with Coleridge. No doubt it was a thin and hot and humid hand which was thrust into that of the elder poet; for he said, "There is death in that hand," as the young enthusiast rushed away.

Keats, however, was not Cockney in his inspiration. Though he was no scholar, his mind was Greek rather than English. It is not wonderful that a highly educated youth, fed upon Greek poetry from his earliest dawn of perception, should turn back upon the classic ages as the true and only fountains of poetical loveliness and truth. But Keats knew these glories only at secondhand, and the fulness of understanding with which he jumped at them looks almost like divination. His mind answered to the far-off touch of the ancient divinities before he

knew what they were. He has left in his sonnet on Chapman's Homer an admirable description of the effect produced upon him by his first introduction to the Greeks and their divine fables—

“ Oft of a wide expanse, had I been told,  
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne :  
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene,  
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold :  
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies,  
When a new planet swims into his ken ;  
Or, like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes,  
He stared at the Pacific - and all his men  
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—  
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.”

This great new sea of inexhaustible story and vision which the young reader “shouted” with delight to discover was the very element of his soul. He flung himself into it with a comprehension and feeling which few of its profoundest investigators ever attain. Had he found his inspiration in his own century, in the atmosphere which he and his contemporaries were breathing, we, for our part, would have thought the choice wiser. But such was not the bent of his genius. He turned from the confusions of his own age, which he had neither strength nor inclination to fathom, to the calm and distant land of shadows, where gods and goddesses came down to men, where Endymion wooed Diana, and the Sun-god was superseded on his throne—with the relief at once of physical weakness and natural disposition. He was not robust enough for political strife, or to struggle as his contemporaries were doing with noisy questions about the Regent's morals or manners, or the corruptions of the State. It was so much easier and more delightful to escape into the silvery brightness, the magical dreams and dews of Olympus, even as reflected in dim mirrors of English, and amid the commonplace surroundings of our

latter days. From the first glimpse we have of him in his letters, amid the weak boyish jokes and banter which are not worth preserving or reading, there occur continual references which show how early poetry had become his chief object in life. Those whom life endows more abundantly with other interests may play with their inspiration, feeling towards that divine gift as, according to Byron, men do towards a scarcely stronger passion—

“Man’s love is of man’s life a thing apart,  
’Tis woman’s whole existence.”

This was the case of Keats in respect to the heavenly gift, which was all that redeemed his dim existence to him. In poetry his was the woman’s part—it occupied all his thoughts. “I find I cannot exist without eternal poetry,” he says at a very early period; “I began with a little, but habit has made me a leviathan. I had become all in a tremble from not having written anything of late; the sonnet overleaf did me good—I slept the better last night for it.” There is something hectic in this eagerness, as if the fervid boy already divined how little time he had in the world to exercise his gift.

He had made considerable progress in his medical studies when, either the need of poetical expression became so urgent or the encouragements of his friends led him to believe that he had in his genius a means, not only of delight but of feasible occupation. Early in 1817, when he was twenty-two, he went to the Isle of Wight, in order to “be alone and improve himself,” as he says, and evidently with the intention of testing his powers in some greater effort than he had yet attempted: and here *Endymion* was begun. His mind was full of the importance, almost solemnity of this outset. “I have asked myself so often why I should be a poet more than other men, seeing how great a thing it is, how great things are

to be gained by it, what a thing to be in the mouth of fame, that at last the idea has grown so monstrously beyond my seeming power of attainment that the other day I nearly consented with myself to drop into a Phaeton," he writes to Leigh Hunt in the midst of a trifling letter full of the usual semi-poetical chatter of the coterie. But he seems at the same time to have held himself aloof from the perpetual discussions, criticisms, and laudations with which such a society receives the productions of its members, and retained his independence. "If poetry comes not naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all," he says, and with the true spirit of an artist adds a little later, "I am anxious to get *Endymion* printed, that I may forget it and proceed." This is like anything rather than the puling boy which he was once represented to be.

The story of *Endymion* does not require any description here. The poet leads us through endless glades, through enchanted ravines, by fountains and streams of fairy beauty, with his love-lorn youth, who is devoured by an overpowering passion for an immortal, far greater and more beautiful than any earthly maiden. The charm of the mystery, and the intoxication of a love almost too great for mortal faculties, absorbs and abstracts altogether the shepherd prince, who is not yet worthy to join his lady in the skies, and who does not even know which of the divinities it is who has raised him to this dizzy elevation of visionary passion. The development of romantic life which the poet has given to the pair of lovers and their secret meetings is just such a filling out of the old fable with the new existence of modern genius, as gives the legend a delicate human charm. It never attains to the melody of Shelley's verse; but remote as the subject is from human experience, it is a little nearer the solid ground than the adventures of Laon and Cythna: for Keats never loses hold of his little silvery thread of

narrative, and keeps all his descriptions and musings within a certain relation to it. *Endymion* is not a great poem. It is not perfect in its melody even, but full of numberless little jars and breaks of poetical discord. The oft-quoted line with which it begins, and which has become a sort of copy-book commonplace by dint of usage, is Leigh-Huntish, and a perfect emblem of the sentimental half-sham half-slang used by the little poetical tribe who decorated their parlours with green boughs and statuettes, and considered themselves priests of beauty and nature. "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:" it is the very sentiment of those little meetings where all was melody and nonsense and poetical definition and ornament, and where art was not, nor nature. But the poet goes far beyond his keynote, and in the leisure of youth lingers over lovely images, half complete, and glimpses of the divine—not indeed of the spiritual kind, nor embodying a noble moral, or any elevation of the human towards a sublimer sphere—but the divine of classical dreams and visions in which personal bliss and the soft intoxication of pleasure were all that was dreamed of as perfection. The sweet and aimless song has no theories in it such as Shelley was bound to interweave in his wildest wandering visions. Keats, though he was so little apart from his great contemporary in age, was no child of Revolution. He wanted nothing but to roam about the unimaginable tangles of the dewy woods and meet his goddess, humouring his humanity by long despondencies and privations of her presence, till it flashed upon him in a moment, with that sudden note of joy and sudden bursting of the darkness into light which makes every darkness suggestive, and every corner a hiding-place beyond which rapture lurks, to the instinct of youth. It is this which makes Keats the favourite of young readers. His song is the song of youth and natural delight.

This artless utterance had but a harsh welcome from the world. The hot animosity which politics excited, and the prejudice with which the little community of the suburbs, in all its mingled criminality of sentiment and sweetness, of Radicalism and impecuniosity, was regarded, found vent upon the boyish production of a young man who cared little about politics and had but a transitory connection with the coterie. Why Wilson, in all his genial bigness, should have foamed at the mouth over Leigh Hunt it is wonderful to imagine, save that there is a kind of soft pretension which irritates more than greater sins : but the poor young poet, supposed to be a disciple of his school, was still more savagely used by the censors of literature on all sides. *Blackwood*, in a cruel mood, advised him to go back to his gallipots, and sneered at the starved apothecary after a brutal fashion of the time which has happily disappeared from our usages now-a-days. And no one treated him more contemptuously than Byron, who could not find epithets nasty enough to vent his disdain in, and who, when Jeffrey generously stepped into the field to maintain the cause of the unfortunate youth, declared with bitter spitefulness that he himself no longer cared for the applause which he shared with such a being. So far did all these assaults go, that it was the common belief of the time that Mr. Gifford, in the *Quarterly* (the poet of Anna), had killed Keats—a supposed guilt which called forth the fierce and eloquent denunciation of Shelley in the *Adonais*. But this was not true, though no doubt the critic deserved what he got for some other iniquity, if not for that. The young poet bore these attacks with manly and modest firmness. He was “far more annoyed” by the cool indifference of Wordsworth—who remarked only, “It is a pretty piece of Paganism,” when the *Hymn to Pan* was read to him—than by the more public abuse with which he was assailed.

"I begin to get a little acquainted with my own strength and weakness," he says with dignity to some anxious sympathisers: "my own domestic criticism has given me pain without comparison beyond what *Blackwood* or the *Quarterly* could inflict." And here is a vindication of his youthful work which it would be difficult to surpass in candour or manliness. The reference is to a letter which had been published in the *Morning Chronicle* in defence of the young poet.

"J. S. is perfectly right in regard to the 'slipshod Endymion.' That it is so is no fault of mine. No! though it may sound a little paradoxical, it is as good as I had power to make it by myself. Had I been nervous about it being a perfect piece, and with that view asked advice, and trembled over every page, it would not have been written; for it is not in my nature to fumble. I will write independently. I have written independently *without judgment*: I may write independently and with judgment hereafter. The Genius of poetry must work out its own salvation in a man. It cannot be matured by law and precept, but by sensation and watchfulness in itself. That which is creative must create itself. In *Endymion* I leaped headlong into the sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the soundings, the quicksands, and the rocks, than if I had stayed upon the green shore and piped a silly pipe, and taken tea and comfortable advice."

Keats neither responded to his critics by savage retaliation like Byron, nor broke a bloodvessel as he was reported to have done, but continued on his way with a composure and lofty meaning very remarkable in so young a man. "I will assay to reach to as high a summit in poetry as the nerve bestowed upon me will suffer," he says. "The faint conceptions I have of poems to come bring the blood frequently into my forehead. . . . I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the beautiful, even if my night's labours should be burnt every morning, and no eye ever shine upon them." "This is a mere matter of the moment," he writes a little later to his brother in America; "I think I shall be among the



English Poets after my death." Few men have stood with firmer self-possession yet humility, to receive the often maddening sharpness of those critical spears which hurtled through the air with virulence so uncalled for.

Keats had a harder blow to sustain some time after in the death of his brother, "poor Tom," the consumptive youth over whom he had watched for long. The seeds of the same disease were evidently in himself before, but it was in the spring, after Tom's death, that he returned one evening to Hampstead, where he was living with a friend, very ill and much agitated. He had driven there on the outside of the stage-coach, and had caught cold. "Getting into bed, he slightly coughed and said, 'That is blood; bring me the candle,' and after gazing on the pillow, turning round with an expression of sudden and solemn calm, said, 'I know the colour of that blood, it is arterial blood; I cannot be deceived in the colour. That drop is my death-warrant. I shall die.'" A more touching scene could scarcely be imagined. He was twenty-three, and the first fascinations of a most passionate love had caught hold upon him. "If you would have me recover," he said pathetically to the friend, Mr. Charles Brown, with whom he was living; "flatter me with a hope of happiness when I shall be well." The object of his love lived in the next house, and in a collection of letters to her, recently published,—a very pitiful but perhaps unnecessary publication,—there is a series of touching little notes, imploring her from his sick-bed, sometimes to come to him, sometimes not to come, as the fluctuations of sickness demanded. "I will wait patiently till to-morrow," he says. "Send me the words 'Good-night,' to put under my pillow." "I read your note in my bed last night, and that might be the reason of my sleeping so much better. Send me every evening a written Good-night." "If I am to recover, the day of my recovery shall see me by

your side, from which nothing shall separate me. If well, you are the only medicine that can keep me well." The fluctuations of this bitter drama are heartrending. After a while the poor sick lad began to feel himself a clog upon the girl he loved, and was stunned by the news that she was about to leave home, and that they were to be separated; and though unable to conceive how he shall support such a blow, "I must be patient," he says pathetically, "and in the meantime you must think of it as little as possible." When this danger is abated, he follows her in his imagination as she moves about. "You will have a pleasant walk to-day. I shall see you pass. I shall follow you with my eyes over the heath. Will you come towards evening instead of before dinner? When you are gone 'tis past. If you do not come till the evening I have something to look forward to all day." Poetry could not express more powerfully than these simple words the longing of the sick heart for the object of its love.

Before this melancholy time, which was indeed the beginning of sorrows, Keats had written the *Pot of Basil*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *Lamia*, and several of the smaller poems, which are to our thinking the noblest of all: and the fragment of *Hyperion*, which is generally acknowledged as his greatest effort. The latter production has been the subject of extravagant praise. Byron, the poor poet being dead, describes this poem vaguely but grandiloquently as seeming to be "actually inspired by the Titans, and as sublime as *Æschylus*," and Shelley describes it as "surely in the very highest style of poetry." It is very different from the easy grace and irregular sweetness of *Endymion*. The subject of *Hyperion* is the dethroning of the ancient gods, a grand and sombre theme, in which we might have supposed a certain relation to the *Prometheus* of Shelley, had not the production of the younger poet preceded that of the elder. There is something of the same marble

stateliness and grandeur in the first presentation of the subjects of the poem. How great was the progress which the poetic youth had made from the time of his pretty sentimentalising about "the thing of beauty" will be seen at once in the noble opening of this great fragment.

"Deep in the shady stillness of a vale  
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,  
Far from the fiery noon, and eve's one star,  
Sat grey-haired Saturn, quiet as a stone,  
Still as the silence round about his lair ;  
Forest on forest hung about his head  
Like cloud on cloud. No stir of air was there,  
Not so much life as on a summer's day  
Robs not one light seed from the feather'd grass,  
But where the dead leaf fell there did it rest.  
A stream went voiceless by, still deaden'd more  
By reason of his fallen divinity  
Spreading a shade : the Naiad 'mid her reeds,  
Press'd her cold finger closer to her lips.

Along the margin-sand large foot-marks went,  
No further than to where his feet had stray'd,  
And slept there since. Upon the sodden ground  
His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead,  
Unscathed ; and his realmless eyes were closed ;  
While his bow'd head seem'd listening to the Earth,  
His ancient mother, for some counsel yet.

It seem'd no force could wake him from his place :  
But there came one, who with a kindred hand  
Touch'd his wide shoulders, after bending low  
With reverence though to one who knew it not.  
She was a Goddess of the infant world ;  
By her in stature the tall Amazon  
Had stood a pigmy's height : she would have ta'en  
Achilles by the hair and bent his neck ;  
Or with a finger stay'd Ixion's wheel.  
Her face was large as that of Memphian Sphinx,  
Pedestall'd haply in a palace-court,  
Where sages look'd to Egypt for their lore.  
But, oh ! how unlike marble was that face,

How beautiful, if sorrow had not made  
Sorrow more beautiful than beauty's self.  
There was a listening fear in her regard,  
As if calamity had but begun,  
As if the vanward clouds of evil days  
Had spent their malice, and the sullen rear  
Was with its stored thunder labouring up.  
One hand she press'd upon that aching spot  
Where beats the human heart, as if just there,  
Though an immortal, she felt cruel pain :  
The other upon Saturn's bended neck  
She laid, and to the level of his ear  
Leaning with parted lips, some words she spake  
In solemn tenour and deep organ tone :  
Some mourning words, which in our feeble tongue  
Would come in these like accents ; O ! how frail,  
To that large utterance of the early gods !"

This is in a very different strain from the languorous melody of *Endymion*. To Keats himself it appeared too like Milton. "I have given up *Hyperion*," he says ; "there were too many Miltonic inversions in it." But we do not think the reader now will think the similarity very great. Fine as this is, however, the young warmth and fanciful luxuriance of the earlier poem has perhaps a stronger hold upon the general mind, which understands a love-tale, even when the beloved maiden is a goddess, better than the sentiment of Godhead dethroned.

It is not, however, even upon *Hyperion* that Keats's best title to fame is founded, at least with the general reader. The beauty of his lyrics is, above everything else, the charm that endears him to the popular mind ; and we might say once more, that if all his works, except those preserved in Mr. Palgrave's delightful little volume, were to die out of recollection, his *Ode to a Nightingale*, that to *Autumn*, the loveliest embodiment of the "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness," that *On a Greek Vase*, which contains so wonderful a description of the immortal life of the past, arrested in a moment of fullest activity and pre-

served for ever by art : would still secure his immortality. These verses are above criticism, and cannot be read but with a gentle rapture, that supreme satisfaction of ear and mind which makes us linger and repeat and part unwillingly with the liquid lines. "The admirable *Ode to a Nightingale*," says Lord Houghton, "was suggested by the continual song of the bird that, in the spring of 1819, had built her nest close to the house, and which often threw Keats into a sort of trance of tranquil pleasure. One morning he took his chair from the breakfast-table, placed it on the grass-plot under a plum-tree, and sat there for two or three hours with some scraps of paper in his hands. Shortly afterwards Mr. Brown saw him thrusting them away as wastepaper behind some books, and had considerable difficulty in putting together and arranging the stanzas of the ode." So true was it, that as he himself says, his love of the beautiful would have made him write even without the stimulus of publication. This was at the moment when his heart was most full, and everything within him at the highest tide of feeling. His young brother was dead ; the sole passion of his life had begun : love and grief had touched the depths within him ; and he himself, alas ! though he did not know it, had begun to falter upon the edge of his premature grave.

It was in the end of 1818 that his brother died. In the summer following his letters to the lady whom he loved so passionately began ; but it was not till early in 1820, after the fatal chill which has been described, that these letters began to reflect the miserable certainty which was creeping upon him, that his love was one of those which could never have an earthly close. The *Letters to Fanny Brawn*, which have been published very recently, have all the makings of a tragic poem in them. "Health is my expected heaven, and you are the Hourì," he says, when recovery seemed still possible. "My mind," he

writes in another letter, "has been the most discontented and restless one that ever was put into a body too small for it. I never felt my mind repose upon anything with complete and undistracted enjoyment—upon no person but you. When you are in the room my thoughts never fly out of the window; you always concentrate my entire senses." When he improves a little, he tells her of his impatience, which increases as he feels himself on the borders of health, and that she has made him think more seriously of his illness than it deserved: for "how horrid was the chance of slipping into the ground instead of into your arms—the difference is amazing, love!" In one little note he cries out with enthusiasm that he could build an altar to her for staying at Hampstead to be near him; yet in the next more soberly assures her that she is wrong in supposing that he is displeased because she has gone to town and not stayed at Hampstead after all. "God bless my sweet love!" he adds—"illness is a long lane; but I see you at the end of it, and shall mend my pace as well as possible." As summer advanced his health improved. His last volume, containing *Isabella*, *Jamia*, and several of the shorter poems, was published, and he began to think of settled occupation. But ere long all his prospects were darkened again; the spitting of blood, which had been his brother's chief symptom, returned, and the doctors ordered him to a warmer climate for the winter. "They talk of my going to Italy," he cries in despair to his Fanny. "'Tis certain I shall never recover if I am to be so long separate from you;" though in the same breath he breaks out into wild reproaches that she does not know what it is to love: "I have heard you say that it was not unpleasant to wait a few years," he cries with passionate wonder over such a sentiment. The letters that follow grow more and more miserable in their passionate dissatisfaction:—

"Every hour I am more and more concentrated in you," he says; "everything else tastes like chaff in my mouth;" but he adds in the same letter—"For all this I am averse to seeing you; I cannot bear flashes of light and return into my gloom again. . . . If my health would bear it, I could write a poem, which I have in my head, which would be a consolation for people in such a situation as mine. I would show some one in love, as I am, with a person living in such liberty as you do. Shakspeare always sums up matters in a sovereign manner. Hamlet's heart was full of such misery as mine is when he said to Ophelia, 'Go to a nunnery—go, go!' Indeed, I should like to give up the matter at once; I should like to die. I am sickened at the brute world which you are smiling with. . . . The world is too brutal for me; I am glad there is such a thing as the grave. I am sure I shall never have any rest till I get there."

By this time the poor young poet had got jealous of his dearest friends; suspicions that Fanny's thoughts were divided between himself and Brown, and wild imaginations of the freedom with which she would move about and enjoy herself, while he was suffering and far away, made his soul sick. At last he seems to have started quite suddenly, accompanied by the young painter Severn, who risked his whole career by his determination to accompany the ailing and miserable young man to Rome. "Keats did not even give notice to Brown, "though at this moment I should be without pence were it not for his assistance." His jealous, wounded, hopeless heart took a kind of consolation in bursting all bonds that linked him to his former life. He plunged into the unknown, like Byrot's strong swimmer, who plunged into the sea to forestal fate. They set out quite suddenly with some show of cheerfulness on the part of the sufferer, though the ink was scarcely dry of the letter in which he had poured forth the burden of his misery. "Keats," Severn wrote, "looks very happy; for myself (in the delight of his heroic friendship) I would not change with any one." They sailed from London to Naples, one of those terrible

lingering voyages which are now no longer a necessary aggravation of the always dismal journey in search of health. On shipboard the unhappy young poet wrote to the friend whom he suspected—let us hope without cause—of being his rival, yet whom he still believed in, and could not forsake without a sense of wrong:—

“I wish to write on subjects that will not agitate me much. There is one I must mention, and have done with it. Even if my body would recover of itself, this would prevent it; the very thing which I want to live most for will be a great occasion of my death. I cannot help it; who can help it? Were I in health it would make me ill; and how can I bear it in this state? . . . I wish for death every day and night, to deliver me from these pains, and then I wish death away, for death would destroy even those pains, which are better than nothing. Land and sea, weakness and decline, are great separators, but death is the great divorcer for ever. . . . I seldom think of my brother and sister in America; the thought of leaving Miss —— is, beyond everything, horrible—the sense of darkness coming over me. I eternally see her figure eternally vanishing. Some of the phrases she was in the habit of using in Wentworth Place during my last nursing ring in my ears. Is there another life? Shall I awake and find all this a dream? There must be; we cannot be created for this sort of suffering.”

Thus the poor young fellow wrote, tormenting himself by endless thought, seeing miserable visions, unable either to reconcile himself with life and love, or to make up his mind to their abandonment. Then in an interval of the sickening storm within and without, when the winds and the waves lulled a little, on some night when the sky was blue, and his soul at wistful rest, no longer swept by angry clouds—he for the last time lifted up his trembling voice between heaven and earth—

“Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art,  
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night,  
And watching, with eternal lids apart,  
Like Nature’s patient sleepless Eremite,  
The moving waters at their priest-like task  
Of pure ablution, round earth’s human shores;



Or gazing on the soft new-fallen mask  
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors ;  
No !—yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,  
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,  
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,  
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest ;  
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,  
And so live ever—or else swoon to death."

Thus the troubled and anguished human creature, driven by the winds and tossed, like the never-resting water, he who had made so many songs in his little day of all lovely things, has fixed for us for ever the calm impartial shining of this star, last light of earth that penetrated the growing darkness. One more terrible letter came from Naples, as soon as the forlorn travellers landed, always about *her*, and the misery of being parted from her. "There is nothing in the world of sufficient interest to divert me from her for a moment," he says ; "Oh, that I could be buried near where she lives. I am afraid to write to her, to receive a letter from her—to see her handwriting would break my heart, even to hear of her anyhow ; to see her name written would be more than I can bear. . . . My dear Brown, for my sake, be her advocate for ever. I cannot say a word about Naples. I do not feel at all concerned in the thousand novelties around me. I am afraid to write to her. I should like her to know that I do not forget her. Oh, Brown, I have coals of fire in my breast. It surprises me that the human heart is capable of containing and bearing so much misery." He ends by imploring his friend, when he writes, "If she is well and happy put a mark thus x." A few weeks later another letter came from Rome, with an attempt at cheerfulness and a kind of pathetic ghostly banter. "If I recover, I will do all in my power to correct the mistakes made during sickness, and if I should not, all my faults will be forgiven." . . . Then he adds

with the fleeting tearful smile of weakness, "I can scarcely bid you good-bye, even in a letter. I always made an awkward bow. God bless you.—JOHN KEATS."

Apparently these were the last words he ever wrote. This was in November 1820, and he lingered painfully till February 1821. At the very end of his days there came a letter from the too much beloved, a mere glance at which tore him to pieces; it was put unread into his coffin. And thus ended life and love together, so far as mortal eyes can see.

This wonderful passion, so hectic and feverish, so devouring and unsatisfied, was the only human influence that helped to kill the young poet. Love, and not Mr. Gifford in the *Quarterly*. It was not even she that did it, but the horror of being forced from her, and the want of faith in her faithfulness. But love is a more seemly and a more dignified slayer than a critic,—if it were possible to look thus lightly at a conclusion so full of anguish. He directed that the words "Here lies one whose name was writ in water," should be put on his grave. But he was more right in the earlier youthful confidence with which he pronounced that he should be among the poets of England after he died, than in this mournful sentence on himself. No poet who has done so little bears a higher fame.

JOHN KEATS, born 1795; died 1821.

Published Poems, 1817.

Endymion, 1818.

Hyperion, Isabella, etc., 1820.

## CHAPTER V.

MOORE —MONK LEWIS—TIE SMITHS, ETC.—PEACOCK —  
THEODORE HOOK—JOHN GALT.

WE have done perhaps some injustice, if not to the permanent position, at least to the contemporary fame of Moore by giving him so small a place in this record. Whether Byron and Shelley were perfectly sincere in their expressions of admiration it would be difficult to divine, for there is perhaps a certain exaggeration permissible and natural in one poet's expressed opinion of another poet who is his friend and admirer, especially when the younger man and newer songster is referring to a previously established reputation. "Lord Byron has read me one or two letters of Moore to him, in which Moore speaks with great kindness of me, and, of course, I cannot but feel flattered by the approbation of a man my inferiority to whom I am proud to acknowledge," says Shelley; and Byron throughout writes to his friend, the only one of all his literary contemporaries for whom he owns any warmth of affection, with perpetual expressions almost of enthusiasm for his poetical powers. These appear very strange to us now when Moore's reputation has dropped from the highest to a very subordinate place in literature, and when all his confectionery compositions, his Eastern tales,—and even the contemporary satires which were effective in their day, have alike fallen into the limbo

whence there is no redemption. His songs still retain, and will always retain, a certain place in the popular memory, but we dare not venture to say that this would have been the case had they not been linked to the beautiful national melodies with which he was so well inspired as to connect them. He belongs to the number of those writers who, like Dives in the parable, had their good things while they were living: and, no doubt, with his gay temper and gentle epicureanism, Moore himself would have much preferred this to the meagre living and posthumous praise of greater poets. Many of his melodies are touching and tender, many of them full of sparkling gaiety and life. There is scarcely any one who does not know the first line, probably the first verse, of scores of those facile and graceful compositions. It is scarcely needful to recall them to the reader; and though in this age of classical music, the simplicity of the ballad has fallen out of fashion, yet the taste for it is too widespread and too natural to be more than temporarily in abeyance. Even now, in the height of a musical renaissance, there are thousands of people who will be moved by one of Moore's songs, sung with feeling and expression, against the hundred connoisseurs who will think it beneath their notice.

“She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps,  
And lovers around her are sighing,  
But wildly she turns from their gaze and weeps,  
For her heart in his grave is lying.

“She sings the wild song of her dear native plains,  
Every note which he loved awaking,  
Ah! little they think who delight in her strains,  
That the heart of the minstrel is breaking.

“He had lived for his love, for his country he died,  
They were all that to life had entwined him;  
Nor soon shall the tears of his country be dried,  
Nor long shall his love stay behind him.

“ Oh ! make her a grave where the sunbeams rest,  
When they promise a glorious morrow,  
They’ll shine o’er her sleep, like a smile from the West,  
From her own lov’d island of sorrow.”

This is the perfection of verse for the poet’s purpose—to be sung, not read. Its meaning needs no second thought, it is full of picturesque and tender suggestion, yet never overbalances the air by too much poetry. A pathetic story and a passionate national sentiment are concentrated in it with exquisite grace and smoothness. The Irish singer may be excused if he feels that he has done something for his country when he sings such a refined epitome of its woe. But beyond this there is little to say, and Moore had no revelation of his race to give, to bring it near to the general heart. He had enough nationality for this pathetic sentiment, and for a poetical appreciation of the hopeless wrongheaded heroism of those poor young Irish rebels who flung themselves against the strength of England like children against a locked and bolted door. But he had nothing to tell of his country, no insight into it or means of interpretation. Many have been the wrongs of Ireland, and her disabilities in the march of human progress ; but none greater than this, for which Providence alone is responsible, that in the allotment of genius she got, instead of Burns and Scott, only Tom Moore and Miss Edgeworth, excellent artists both, but with the thinnest burden of prophecy, the most limited revelation. If Scotland had been endowed no better, it might not, perhaps, have affected her manufactories (but even for this we should not like to undertake to answer), but it certainly would have modified her position most strangely, and restricted her development. Burns made the face of his country luminous, and carried the songs of its peasantry, the loves of its cottages, into the sympathy and friendship of the world. But Moore’s communications

were of a strictly drawing-room character, and Ireland might have been lost in the mists of the South Seas for anything he has to tell us of her inner heart and being. St. James's and polite society were heaven to the sociable little Dublin beau, who would not for the world have had the ladies suppose that he knew anything of Paddy save his jokes and lightheartedness, the conventional drapery that has hid him for ages. The great poet who is born a peasant is little likely to do much for himself in the present, or perhaps in any conditions of the world. But how much he is able to do for his country! Ireland, however, as yet, has never had the smallest promise of a Burns.

It is evident, however, that Moore's faculty was thought very highly of by his contemporaries. The terrible Jeffery, chief slaughterer of the innocents, against whom every great writer of the age had a grievance, descends from his throne of darkness almost to plead for the aid of Moore in the great review—a most remarkable testimony to his powers. The sugary bubbles of *Lalla Rookh* brought him in no less a sum than £3000, and his *Irish Melodies* seem to have procured him, for many years, an income of £500 a year. These are substantial proofs of popularity. His *Life of Byron* will always remain the most trustworthy and genuine of the poet's records. Even in its partiality it is never false, and we doubt if any one could have held the balance more steadily, or discriminated with sounder sense, the wonderful gifts of genius, and the dangerous tendencies of character which made his friend and hero so great and so miserable. His connection with Byron altogether is one of his chief claims upon the recollection of posterity. In the beginning of that connection Moore certainly gave as much or more than he received of social distinction and semi-patronage, and all that Byron did for him in later years was to involve him

in a painful debt and still more painful discussion. When Moore visited Venice in 1819, Byron presented him with an extraordinary mark of regard in the shape of his own autobiography, a precious packet of manuscript, full of the most intimate experiences of that stormy life about which the world was so curious. Moore, no doubt, like so many other people, was in want of money, which perhaps, Byron was expected to help him to—for there is repeated reference to the fact that this precious packet, which would have excited public curiosity to the utmost, was excellent security, upon which Murray would not refuse to make an important advance. With the condition that it was not to be published till after his death, Byron seems to have contemplated with satisfaction the publication of these memoirs and the commotion they would produce, and afterwards added, on several occasions, to the MS. in Moore's hands, or rather in the hands of Murray, whither they had been transferred as security for £2000 advanced to Moore. When the poet died so prematurely and with so little warning, this MS. naturally became the object of many eager and anxious thoughts. Some conflict about the property and Moore's right of redeeming it from the hands of the publisher we need not enter into. As a matter of fact, Moore paid back the £2000, and reluctantly, as may well be supposed, but honourably, submitted the manuscript to the examination of a sort of small committee, representing Byron's wife and sister, by whom it was destroyed. Many regrets and some vituperations have been spent upon this act. Lord John Russell assures us that he read the MS., and that the sacrifice of it was but a trifling loss to the world. In the face of many admirers of Byron's letters and personal revelations, it may seem a bold thing to say that we should be little surprised if this were strictly true. To ourselves it has always seemed that the letters and

journals, so far as they have been published, were far too hurried and superficial, too full of levity and the swing and haste of the moment, to be at all worthy of so great a poet: nor can we imagine that his reputation would be increased by any further accumulation of such material, putting aside altogether the likelihood that what he had to reveal might have been little conducive to either public or private advantage. Anyhow, it was Moore and not the wealthier friends—the rich wife and relations—who bore the expense of this holocaust, which is a wonderful testimony to his high spirit and honourable feeling. On the other hand, we may allow that his *Life of Lord Byron* made up in some degree for his sacrifice. It brought a substantial recompense in money, and added to his reputation—and those results would, no doubt, have been in a great measure prevented by the stronger interest of any personal chronicle issued with the authority of Byron's name.

Moore wrote a life of Sheridan in the earlier part of his career, and also a memoir of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, and executed a considerable amount of miscellaneous literary work. He lived to be an old man, dying so late as 1852; and for the expiation of any literary sins he may have perpetrated, left his own hapless memory to the care of Lord John Russell, who, too busy in the affairs of State to spend much time in the execution of such a commission, shovelled up all the unfortunate poet's scraps and notes into a sort of wastepaper-basket of eight volumes, where they lie for the investigation of any reader, who may think it worth his while to produce for himself, out of these incoherent materials, some idea of the lively intelligence and good-humoured genial character of the author of *Irish Melodies*. These everyday jottings and familiar communications are always kind, affectionate, and cheerful, and give us the utmost satisfaction as to



Moore's moral and domestic character: but they are trivial, as the sweepings of any man's study would probably be. Had he dealt unkindly by Sheridan or Byron, this treatment would have been poetic justice. But he did not do so. His own work is always conscientious and careful. The friendly and sensible little man did his very best for his heroes, so that the cruelty with which he has himself been treated is all the greater. It is a lesson to poets to resist the allurements of social ambition, and rather to trust a brother hack in literature than a statesman and a noble peer.

It is almost vain to attempt a reproduction of all the lighter figures which embellished Society at this period, and made literature fashionable. The larger shades of Mackintosh, Brougham, and Hallam, who gave dignity to the assemblies at Holland House, have been already mentioned, and demand treatment more serious. But in the general London world there is no appearance more characteristic and amusing than that of the quaint little magician, with his trifling countenance and his mask of horror, Matthew Gregory Lewis, known to everybody in his own time and ours as Monk Lewis, though in these days not one reader in a thousand has any acquaintance with the romance which earned him that name. He was the son of a rich man who held a lucrative post under Government, and had abundant private means, and of a pretty fantastic fine lady, fond of fine company, of music and musicians, and all the curiously mixed and heterogeneous society which fashion and the arts make up between them. The boy was brought up in his mother's drawing-room, giving his childish opinions with quaint precocity upon every subject, from a classical sonata to a lady's headdress, and keeping his mother's friends in amusement. When he was still a schoolboy, quarrels arose in his home, which resulted in a separation between

his parents, and the pretty, proud, frivolous mother, left her husband's house. Henceforward, the precocious boy became her affectionate friend, protector, and champion, dividing his schoolboy means with her, when her thoughtless expenditure had exhausted her own, writing her long tender letters about all that was going on, sympathising, guiding, deferring to her opinion, confiding all his plans, literary and otherwise, to her. A more touching picture could not be than that of this curious pair, in themselves so imperfect, the faded, extravagant, foolish, but loving mother, and her fat little undergraduate, so sensible, so tender, so constant, so anxious to anticipate all her wants, scarcely betraying the consciousness that these wants are sometimes unreasonable, and while he pours out all his heart to her, still remaining loyally just and faithful to the father, whose liberality he will not hear impugned. At sixteen the youth had already written a farce which he hoped Mrs. Jordan would think worthy of her acting, and two volumes of a novel, though neither of them seem to have seen the light : and from that time his pen seems never to have been laid down. His play of the *East Indian* was actually accepted and acted when he was very little older, the profits of it being intended as a present for his mother, who managed this part of his business for him, having apparently kept up her connection with actors and the artist world generally. "Should I not obtain a farthing from the *East Indian*," he says, however, "I trust I have a much surer prospect of making you a little present than depends upon the humour of a gallery. The volume of poems of which I spoke to you in my last letter are now completed, and by July I trust I shall get them copied out fair and in a fit manner to put them into the hands of a publisher. I have no doubt of selling it. . . . Whatever this work produces, you may reckon upon every farthing of it as

your own. If the *East Indian* succeeds, I shall set about arranging *Adelaide* for representation. The opera of *Felix* could easily be brought out upon the strength of my first play. In short, I have a number of irons in the fire, and I think some of them must answer my purpose." The young man was nineteen when he set this catalogue of productions upon paper, and cheerfully confident in his powers. *The Monk* was written when he was twenty. It had been begun some time before and laid aside, but when the young author read the *Mysteries of Udolpho*, which he considered "one of the most interesting books that has ever been published," he resumed his interrupted work, and in two weeks produced the "romance of between three and four hundred pages" upon which his future fame was built. *The Monk* was published in 1795. Mrs. Radcliffe's books had given the public a taste for wonder and mystery, and this had special piquancies of its own to refresh the jaded appetite. It leaped into immediate fame. "This singular composition," says a contemporary critic, "which has neither originality, morals, nor probability to recommend it, has excited and will continue to excite the curiosity of the public, such is the irresistible energy of genius!" Such, we may add once more, are the inconceivable delusions of contemporaries; but Monk Lewis's genius was at least as much the laughing-stock of his generation, as an object of admiration to them. By some good people the production, however, was taken so seriously, that the Attorney-General of the day was "instructed by one of the societies for the suppression of vice, to move for an injunction to suppress its sale." We should be disposed to say now that it is hardly up to the mark of a "penny dreadful," even in point of literary merit. The horrors are of the crudest description, and there is neither character nor force of writing to redeem them. Mrs. Radcliffe is incomparably

superior. There must have been something in the contrast between the fat little boyish person, blubber lips and beady eyes, of the author, and the atrocities he lisped forth so innocently, which tickled Society. It is scarcely possible to conceive any more serious reason for his fame.

A year after *The Monk* came the *Castle Spectre*, a drama of the same description, which once more was received with great favour by the public, and was followed by many other plays, one of them an extraordinary composition, which the author calls a monodrama, *The Captive*, in which the stage is held by one sole performer, representing a lady unjustly confined in a madhouse, whose frantic appeal to her gaoler, and afterwards her long soliloquy to herself and hearers, to prove that "I am not mad, I am not mad," interrupted only by dumb show, the attempt of a frantic madman to get into her cell, and finally the arrival of her deliverers, when she has almost raved herself into real madness—produced the most extraordinary effect upon the audience. "Never did Covent Garden present such a picture of agitation and dismay. Ladies bathed in tears, others fainting, and some shrieking with terror—while such of the audience as were able to avoid demonstrations like these, sat aghast with pale horror painted on their countenances." The temerity of the young author of twenty-one who could venture on such an innovation is as extraordinary as the effect produced, which no doubt was owing to the powers of the actress, and the melodramatic force of the situation.

The family history of the Lewises was shortly after disturbed by an incident which plunged them into unimaginable terror. The mother, separated from them, yet not shut out from their kindness, and to whom Matthew clung with so much devotion, took a step which threatened to sever all the ties still left between them. She wrote

a novel! When this terrible fact was known, her son with a panic almost beyond words, rushed to pen and ink, to implore her to suppress it. By every motive which can move a woman, he abjures her to make this sacrifice. To be sure there were reasons why it might be doubly painful to such a household to be brought under the criticism of the time, to which personal gossip was delightful; but the horror with which her son contemplates the mother's authorship is doubly amusing at the present moment, when to write novels has become so common an accomplishment.

"I do most earnestly and urgently supplicate you, whatever may be its merits, not to publish your novel," he says. "I cannot express to you in language sufficiently strong, how disagreeable and painful my sensations would be were you to publish any work of any kind, and thus hold yourself out as an object of newspaper animadversion and impertinence. I am sure every such paragraph would be like the stab of a dagger to my father's heart. It would do a material injury to Sophia; and although Maria has found an asylum from the world's malevolence, her mother's turning novel writer would, I am convinced, not only severely hurt her feelings, but raise the greatest prejudice against her in her husband's family. As for myself, I really think I should go to the Continent immediately upon your taking such a step. . . . Be assured the trade of authoress is not an enviable one. In the last letter I had from poor Mrs. K——, she said that if she could but procure for her children the common necessities of life by hard labour, she would prefer it to the odious task of writing."

This is a sermon which would greatly surprise an intending novelist of the present moment. Mrs. Lewis gave in to the terrible penalties thus set before her, and sacrificed her work, which no doubt—as would probably be the case with a great many competitors for fame—was the best thing she could do. "I always consider a female author as a sort of half-mary," her severe counsellor goes on to say. Poor lady, though he is so kind to her, he does not spare any little literary vanity of which she may

have been possessed. "I never before heard of you being accused of having written *The Monk*. This goes more to put me out of humour with the book than all the fury" with which the critics had assailed it; and he adds with disdainful irony, "I am quite of your opinion when you say that it would be better for you, as a woman, to write dull sermons than *The Monk*, not merely on the score of delicacy, but because *a dull work will prevent its author being much talked of*, a point, in my opinion, of all others the most desirable for a woman to attain." To see this little cock-sparrow of two-and-twenty thus laying down the law is very comic. These were the days when Mr. Collins in Miss Austen's novel declared that he was aware no "elegant female" ever accepted a proposal at the first asking, and when it was still popularly accepted as a rule that it was no disgrace to a woman to be clever or instructed, so long as she did not show it—"a tragedy *not* intended for publication," even the severe "*Monk*" had no objection to.

But though he objected to her authorship, Lewis was very tender to his mother, and the story of their constant intercourse, and the reversal of positions which is natural when a precociously sensible, cool-headed, and affectionate boy becomes the protector and guardian of a flighty parent, is pretty, and amusing, and touching in a breath. He was a foolish little fellow upon the outside, frothy and fictitious in his work, which was always more laughable than impressive; but in his domestic relations, and, later, in the larger duties which cost him his life, he was a little hero.

In 1801, out of the midst of all the finest society in London, and travelling with the Duke of Argyll in his landau, as he describes to his mother, he came to Scotland, and encountered in Edinburgh young Walter Scott, a Scotch advocate, on his promotion, newly married and

happy, but as yet undistinguished, fond of old ballads, and trying his skill in translations from the German. Scott told Allan Cunningham, years after, that he had never been so elated as when "the Monk" asked him to dinner at his hotel. The odd little Englishman, with his round projecting eyes and boyish person, "the least man I ever saw," was that wonderful thing, a successful and famous author, and his notice was something to be proud of. Lewis was eager to get contributions for the *Tales of Wonder* which he was then collecting, and of which he informed his new acquaintance "a ghost or a witch was a *sine qua non*;" and they seem to have formed at once a cordial acquaintance, with something in it—save the mark!—of patronage and genial condescension on the part of the visitor. Lewis would seem to have carried his kindness so far as to set on foot negotiations for the publication of Scott's translation of *Goetz von Berlichingen*. What was more remarkable was the correspondence which passed between "the Great Unknown," as he may well be called in such a conjunction, and his literary patron, whom he describes as "a martinet in rhymes and numbers." The idea of Monk Lewis schooling Scott in style and versification is highly comic; and the lectures were "severe enough, but useful eventually," the amiable giant says. Scott's "first serious attempts in verse" were thus brought to light. *The Eve of St. John*, *Glenfinlas*, and several other of his early poems, were published in Lewis's collection. But by this time the temporary fame of *The Monk* had begun to fail, and, nobody knowing the mightier figure which was thus conjoined with this, the *Tales of Wonder* created no particular impression upon the mind of the public. This collection contained the famous ballad of *Alonzo the Brave*, which, as the majority of readers nowadays have, we fear, entirely forgotten, was written as a serious and awe-inspiring poem, and not as a burlesque

Lewis had been living in great comfort during three years of literary activity, with a pretty cottage at Barnes full of all sorts of dainty nicknacks, in which he received the fashionable world, and even entertained, if not angels, princesses—and chambers in the Albany, luxuries such as few men of letters had any chance of. But in 1812 his father died, and he became at once a rich man. Many delightful stories are told of his kindness and beneficence. The little man with his round eyes went about like Haroun Al Raschid, seeing miseries which nobody else saw, and enjoying, no doubt, the excitement of sending an anonymous bank-note with all the suddenness and unfettered liberality of a gift from heaven. There is one instance of the kind showing his readiness both in wit and charity, which we may permit ourselves to tell. He was passing through a country town in which was a company of strolling players, whom he went to see. A young actress of the company, hearing who he was, took the somewhat audacious step of calling upon him at his inn and begging something from him, “any trifle” unpublished, to give *éclat* to her approaching benefit. Lewis promised her a little piece called the *Hindoo Bride*, for which she was to come next day; but, on looking through his papers, found that he had not got it. Not knowing what to do, he went out for a stroll to think over the dilemma in which he found himself, and was forced to take shelter from a shower in a little shop, through the door of which he heard a conversation going on in an adjoining room. He recognised the voice of his petitioner, and listened. The actress was telling her mother what she had done, and it appeared from the conversation that she was the support of the old lady, who on her part, though gratified by the result, feared that the girl might have exposed herself to remark by her boldness. Lewis went back to his inn, and put up a fifty pound note in a letter, in



which he informed his visitor that the *Hindoo Bride* was not to be found. "I have had," he said, "an opportunity of witnessing your very admirable performance of a far superior character in a style true to nature, and which reflects upon you the highest credit. I allude to a most interesting scene in which you lately sustained the character of 'The Daughter!' Brides of all denominations but too often find their empire delusive, but the character you have chosen will improve upon every representation." He left the town the same night, avoiding all thanks and explanations.

No one could be better qualified to understand and appreciate the filial virtues. One of his pleasures on coming into his fortune was to establish his mother in a pretty house, decorated to the last inch of its space, not perhaps in what we should consider as good taste nowadays; but different opinions prevail in different periods as to that indefinable quality. In the little entrance-hall of this "white cottage," opposite the door, there was a cupboard, made by "some matter-of-fact person," one of those admirable conveniences which it is now the fashion to admire. But the new inhabitant had a soul above cupboards. She turned it into a bower of painted roses and honeysuckles, encircling "a magnificent mirror," beneath which "was represented a low white gate, half open, disclosing a winding path and shady perspective of wood and water." This was what was thought the finest of decoration in the beginning of the century. Lewis and his mother would have painted the panels of the cupboard door with bristling perpendicular daisies or lilies had they done their decorations now.

Part of the property left to Lewis by his father consisted of estates in Jamaica, and the kind and conscientious little man had always determined to make himself acquainted with this portion of his possessions, which at

that time meant so much more than it does now. He went to Jamaica accordingly in 1816, and his account of his arrival and residence there, and of the tumultuous simple joy of the negroes whom he could not bear to hear calling themselves his *slaves*, is a far more interesting and worthy recollection than his bleeding nuns and mysterious monks. On his return he visited Italy and Switzerland, and it was on this occasion that we find him with the poets on the Lake of Geneva. Of that meeting, as the reader will recollect, one remarkable literary token remains in Mrs. Shelley's *Frankenstein*, called into existence by his suggestion, in the wet summer days they spent together. There is another relic of the occasion, which has an interest of its own of a different kind. It is a codicil to Lewis's will, framed in the interest of the slaves who had gained his heart. Convinced that they could not be fitly protected unless under the eye of "their proprietor," he resolves to secure their safety "to the very utmost of that power which the law allows me," leaving upon his heirs the obligation of spending three months in Jamaica every third year, of preserving intact all the privileges and regulations which he had given and made for the advantage of the negroes: and forbidding the sale of slaves. All this is laid down in the most stringent and solemn words, with directions that the succession shall pass over every one who refuses to fulfil these conditions, and "solemnly branding with the names of robbers and usurpers of property not belonging to them" any who may endeavour to set aside the will, or to avoid the performance of its obligations. This document is signed, as witnesses, by Byron and Shelley both; and it is a memorial of their meeting which is of the very highest interest. Lewis went back to Jamaica a very short time after, and left the island to return home in May 1818; but he died on the passage, a sacrifice to his

own humanity and sense of duty. Thus nobly ended the life of the butterfly of society—a bad poet and indifferent romancer, but kind and honest and true, a good son and master, resolute to do his duty by all dependent on him. He might have written better verses without being worthy of so much praise.

Another pair of writers to whom society owed a great deal of amusement were brought to the knowledge of the world by a contemporary incident, which would not at first sight have seemed a likely one to produce so much fun and frolic. Drury Lane Theatre, which had been, like most theatres, burnt down, was completed and about to be reopened in October 1812. The directors thought that an ode from some of the many poets of the time would be an appropriate feature in the ceremonial of the opening, and they were so far before their age as to bethink themselves of the fine expedient of putting up the privilege of writing this address to public competition. It is not likely that any of the poets whose names have survived to this time would avail themselves of such an invitation, and consequently, among the huge number of addresses received, not one was found good enough for the purpose. The situation struck the lively wits of two mirth-loving young men, great in fugitive verses both, but with little idea of serious authorship—James and Horace Smith, the sons of a wealthy solicitor, himself of literary tastes and some reputation. Some one suggested the publication of a supposed selection from the condemned poems, and the brothers caught at the idea with glee. There was but six weeks to prepare the volume; but this did not discourage them, and they hastily divided between them the authors whose peculiarities they thought most fit for the purpose. The result was a little book which, written at first as a mere *jeu d'esprit*, has held its ground for the last half century, and is perhaps more generally

known now than many of the great poets, whom, with a keenness and lightness of touch which was never dulled by ill nature, it held up to the genial laughter of the lookers-on. The writers give an amusing account, in their preface to an edition published in 1835 — more than twenty years after — of the difficulty they found in getting their joke into print after having hurried through its composition. The caution of the publishers had nearly spoilt their fun and ours. “‘What have you already written?’ was his first question, an interrogatory to which we had been subjected in almost every instance;” they tell us in their description of this difficulty. The young authors had no answer to give, and in consequence of this the *Rejected Addresses* were themselves over and over again rejected. But at last one more discriminating than the rest was found — as that wise man generally is found — to take the risk; and the success was so rapid and decided that the authors themselves were unfeignedly astonished. The idea tickled the public; and the imitations were very good, better sometimes than the models they copied. Scott was even more delighted than was the general reader with the parody of his own style. “I certainly must have written this myself,” said that fine-tempered man. Lord Byron wrote to Mr. Murray with unusual benignity — “Tell him I forgive him, were he twenty times our satirist.” And Mr. W. Spencer, a name well-nigh unknown to our days, but not considered then so much below the level of Scott and Byron, declared that the audacious versifier was the man of all others he wished to see. There was consequently no drawback upon the pleasure of the amusing little performance, which in all its airy malice pleased everybody. It is impossible to refuse a laugh to the imitations of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, or not to admire the admirable dexterity with which the peculiarities of Scots

and Crabbe were caught. As was inevitable, the collection includes several parodies of poets whose style has long ceased to be known to any one: but that is not the satirist's fault.

Those light-hearted wits did little afterwards to justify the sudden and wide reputation they had thus acquired. The younger, Horace, strayed into prose writing, and was the author of at least one novel, *Brambletye House*, which acquired a good deal of reputation; but James, though he wrote a great many verses in the same jocular vein, never progressed again beyond mediocrity. It was not indeed, his intention to seek the public ear again. "James," says his brother, "implicitly adhered to his favourite position, that when once a man has made a good hit he should rest upon it, and leave off a winner. . . . Having won the prize which seemed to him the only worthy object of contention—a welcome reception wherever he went, and a distinguished position in society—he wanted all motive for further and more serious exertion." He wrote at a later period several dramatic sketches for Charles Mathews, for which he was paid £1000. "A thousand pounds for tomfoolery," he says himself with admiring wonder, adding what Mathews had said, "You are the only man in London who can write what I want—good nonsense." Sometimes, however, the nonsense James Smith wrote was not over good, for writing nonsense is a very fatiguing operation. But he was always genial and kind: "his good sayings were heightened by his cordial good-nature, by the beaming smile and the twinkling eye." And he was always fond of society, and above all of the society of persons of distinction. He loved a lord, like most Englishmen, and still more he loved a lady. When Keats met the two witty brothers at dinner, they did not harmonise with his youthful gravity. "They only served to convince me

how superior humour is to wit," he says tartly. "These men say things which make one start without making one feel: they are all alike, their manners are alike, they all know fashionables, they have all a mannerism in their very eating and drinking, in their mere handling a decanter. They talked of Kean and his low company. 'Would I were with that company instead of yours,' I said to myself." But Keats was jaundiced, and probably did not from his cold heights of poverty and deprivation understand the well-off and peaceful people down on the sunny level of wealth and comfort. And youth is slow to understand wit. James Smith was one of those genial and amiable old bachelors who are always so popular in society. We know most of him, because Horace outlived him and affixed a brief biographical sketch to his *Memoirs*. Otherwise the merits of their great work seem to have been pretty equally divided between them. James contributed a large share of the best of the compositions; but Horace was the author of the *Tale of Drury Lane*, by W. S., which is perhaps the first of all.

The brothers were fond of the brilliant little coterie established by Lady Blessington at Kensington, not very far from the supreme arbiters of taste and fashion at Holland House. Lady Blessington herself was a fashionable novelist of some pretensions, and so was Lady Caroline Lamb, another of the beauties of the period, whose novel *Glenarvon*, an extinct performance, attracted a little attention then, the hero of the piece being supposed to be Byron, who had disastrously crossed the poor lady's life in the period of his brief glory in London. Lady Blessington also contributed something to the Byron literature, manifold as it was. But these light and passing butterflies of literature, ephemera of a moment, can scarcely be reckoned as belonging at all to its history. Their names cling to those of the greater persons to whom some chance associ-

ation attached them, but that is all that can be said. Lady Morgan is a name of somewhat greater importance, and her *Wild Irish Girl* has some right to the honours of a national story. But she too and most of her works have vanished from the permanent acquaintance of the country, as so many others have done who were notable enough in their time. Spencer, Luttrell, Sotheby, Lord Thurlow, and many another, where shall we find any record of them now?

Of a very different order was the writer who, though appearing little in fashionable society, is connected so closely with one of the last group of poets that his place must fall somewhere near Shelley's in the records of literature. Thomas Love Peacock, one of the friends to whom Shelley did the kindest service at a moment when he was in no superfluity of wealth himself, became acquainted with the poet in 1812, when he was living in Wales with his young wife Harriet, shortly after their marriage. Peacock was some seven years older than Shelley, a young man whose education had been irregular, and (as usual) without the University brand, but who was an accomplished scholar, of a keen intellect, and much eccentric satirical power. How a man with so clear an eye for the follies of his neighbours should have formed so warm a friendship with the enthusiast boy, so wayward and visionary, it is difficult to make out; but he did so, and continued so much the trusted friend of the poet that he was named the executor of his will, though they had not seen each other for some years before Shelley's death. He has left us a record of that much-vexed and discussed period of Shelley's life, the time of his separation from Harriet and elopement with Mary, and all the events that flowed from these acts, into which it is not necessary now to enter, save to say that it is perhaps the most unimpassioned and impartial account, doing justice to the

unfortunate Harriet, though without any breach of his friendship with Shelley. Peacock's reputation, however, rests upon the curious series of novels, if novels they can be called, *Headlong Hall*, *Nightmare Abbey*, *Crotchet Castle*, etc., which he has left behind him, books which are scarcely stories, though there is an artificial and whimsical thread of narrative to link their often brilliant conversations and discussions together. These, we were about to say, are unique in literature; but they have served as a model in our own day to other productions of a similar character, not so incisive and terse, and far from being so amusing. But Peacock was for many years alone in the curious vein of satire which he discovered. His method is somewhat artificial; and we can imagine the dismay of the ordinary novel-reader who should suddenly find himself confronted by the caustic fun and amusing dialogue of *Headlong Hall* or *Nightmare Abbey* when in search of an innocent romance. Perhaps it requires the zest of a consciousness, that were we not somewhat superior ourselves, we should not enjoy them, which has disposed such as have come under his spell to regard Peacock with something like enthusiasm. His first book, *Headlong Hall*, published in 1816, introduces us to a curious company, in which each individual is the representative of a theory, and shapes his talk accordingly—one being a "perfectibilian," another a "deteriorationist," and another a "statu-quo-ite,"—very rude symbols indeed of what can scarcely be called types of character so much as abstract figures representing each an opinion which each feels to be triumphantly proved right by every new change of circumstances. Among these oddities, Dr. Gaster plays the moderating part indicated by his name, and carries a savoury odour of good cheer through all the sharp repartees and bold assertions of the antagonists; while Squire Headlong—who, when it is suggested to him that it is his duty to marry and



continue his noble race, cries out with cheerful readiness, "Egad! that is very true; I'll marry directly"—furnishes a most amusing figure. This kind of satire is very easy and impersonal, and leaves the withers entirely unwrung of society in its usual forms; and it is absolutely artificial, and like nothing that ever was seen among mortals. But the fun is very skilful, sometimes dazzling, and always eccentric and amusing. *Nightmare Abbey* is still more wildly unlike anything that ever was in heaven or earth; but here we have what is intended for a sketch of Shelley in the hero of the piece, Scythrop Glowry by name, the only son of the master of Nightmare Abbey, and of a race given up to gloom. Gloom, however, is not the characteristic of the heir, but rather a confused energy and restlessness of mind and imagination, often very amusingly described, though we cannot but think it must have been a considerable test of Shelley's friendship for the writer to accept it as a joke. Here is an introductory sketch:—

"Scythrop proceeded to meditate upon the practicability of reviving a confederation of regenerators. To get a clear view of his own ideas, and to feel the pulse of the wisdom and genius of the age, he wrote and published a treatise, in which his meanings were carefully wrapped up in the monk's hood of transcendental technology, but filled up with hints of matter deep and dangerous, which he thought would set the whole nation in a ferment; and he awaited the result in awful expectation, as a miner who has fired a train awaits the explosion of a rock. However, he listened and heard nothing, for the explosion, if any ensued, was not sufficiently loud to shake a single leaf of the ivy on the towers of Nightmare Abbey; and some months afterwards he received a letter from his bookseller, informing him that only seven copies had been sold, and concluding with a polite request for the balance. Scythrop did not despair. 'Seven copies,' he thought, 'have been sold. Seven is a mystical number, and the omen is good; let me find the seven purchasers of my seven copies and they shall be the seven golden candlesticks with which I will illuminate the world.'"

The vagaries of this visionary youth, and how he

compels his father's consent to his engagement with an ineligible young lady, by appearing before him with a skull in his hand, supposedly filled with some fatal liquid, which he vows he will drink if his petition is refused; but when the consent is given, and the father, rushing in, disturbs an agitated interview by a sudden "Bless you, my children!" and suggests the naming of the wedding-day, responds with an embarrassed "Really, sir, you are so precipitate"—is most whimsically and cleverly told; and so is his final embarrassment between the conflicting claims of two ladies, with both of whom he is in love:—

"He could not dissemble to himself that he was in love at the same time with two damsels of minds and habits as remote as the antipodes. The scale of predilection always inclined to the fair one who happened to be present; but the absent was never effectually outweighed, though the degrees of exaltation and depression varied according to accidental variation in the outward and visible signs of the inward and spiritual graces of his respective charmers. Passing and repassing several times a day from the company of the one to that of the other, he was like a shuttlecock between two battledores, changing its direction as rapidly as the oscillations of a pendulum, receiving many a hard knock on the cork of a sensitive heart, and flying from point to point on the feathers of a super-sublimated head. This was an awful state of things. He had now as much mystery about him as any romantic transcendentalist or transcendental romancer could desire. He had his esoterical and his exoterical love. He could not endure the thought of losing either of them, but he trembled when he imagined the possibility that some fatal discovery might deprive him of both. The old proverb about two strings to a bow gave him some gleams of comfort; but that concerning two stools occurred to him more frequently, and covered his forehead with a cold perspiration."

This is a bold picture to make of a friend, and one who, at the moment, was standing in a much more tragic position of the same kind between his Harriet and his Mary. But it throws a curious light upon the character of Shelley, in which there certainly was—  
notwithstanding his great genius—something elvish and

faun-like, with starts of sudden boldness and timidity like a wild creature.

Character, however, is not Peacock's forte—his personages are all abstract, and harp upon their one string with wonderful cleverness often, but with the monotony which is inseparable from the literary puppet. In his two later works there is a difference in this respect. Dr. Folliot, in *Crotchet Castle*, carried out and continued in Dr. Opimian in *Gryll Grange*, is a well-defined personage: the old-fashioned acute man of the world, in the shape of a squire-parson, a scholar, and a gentleman, with a caustic wit, and a great taste for and comprehension of the good things of this life—disliking all innovations and novelties, and very ready to meet any antagonist in the warfare of words, a conflict in which, however antiquated his opinions may be, his wit and readiness of resource are as like as not to have the best of it. The author himself would seem to have resembled in many things this favourite character. His mixture of fine understanding and prejudice, of brilliant dialectic skill and pugnacious wrongheadedness is as remarkable as his power. These were days in which men were not ashamed to give their prejudices full scope, and to characterise their enemies with unscrupulous vigour. And Peacock had all the hostilities of his literary sect—with a furious contempt for the critics, especially Jeffrey and his brotherhood, and a hatred still deeper for the excellent Southey, who—one scarcely can tell how—seems to have been singled out as the recipient of all the vials of their wrath.

Of the many verses with which these eccentric stories are studded, we must quote a portion of one, which is to be found in the *Misfortunes of Elphin*, a Welsh romance of vague chronology, of the times of Arthur, which is told with admirable humour and mock gravity. The

first lines of this *War Song of the Dinas Vawr* will be found, if they chance to strike the reader's ear and fancy, to be one of those utterances of genius which prove applicable to all the circumstances of life.

- "The mountain sheep are sweeter,  
But the valley sheep are fatter ;  
We therefore deemed it meet  
To carry off the latter.  
We made an expedition,  
We met a host and quelled it,  
We found a strong position,  
And killed the men who held it.
- "On Dyfed's richest valley,  
Where herds of kine were browsing,  
We made a mighty sally,  
To furnish our carousing.  
Fierce warriors rushed to meet us,  
We met them and o'erthrew them ;  
They struggled hard to beat us,  
But we conquered them and slew them.
- "As we drove our prize at leisure,  
The king marched forth to catch us ;  
His rage surpassed all measure,  
But his people could not match us.  
He fled to his hall pillars,  
And ere our force we led off,  
Some sacked his house and cellars,  
While others cut his head off.  
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- "We brought away from battle,  
And much their land bemoaned them,  
Two thousand head of cattle,  
And the head of him that owned them.  
Ednyfed, King of Dyfed,  
His head was borne before us ;  
His wine and beasts supplied our feasts,  
And his overthrow our chorus."

In this ironic banter and *reductio ad absurdum* Peacock has no superior. His books themselves will probably

seem tedious to the hasty reader, but even he will find in them innumerable suggestions which subsequent writers have made capital of. His wine and beasts have helped us to many feasts since his day.

Peacock held for many years an important post in the India House, in which he succeeded James Mill. And when he retired, he was succeeded by that stern philosopher's son, John Stuart Mill, whose fame is still fresh among us. These were all much greater men than Charles Lamb, the beloved Elia, who scribbled so many years away at a humbler desk under the same roof.

Another name which stood high among contemporaries, and occupied, in the opinion of many men, a position entirely different from that which would be allowed to him now, was Theodore Hook, a novelist of much temporary reputation, a successful journalist, and what was perhaps of more importance to his reputation than either, a wit and epigrammatist of the highest acceptance in his day.

"That the author of *Sayings and Doings* stands in jeopardy of passing away rapidly from the memory of man, cannot indeed for a moment be believed," writes his biographer. "So long as taste for the higher works of fiction endures, *Maxwell*, *Gilbert Gurney*, etc., must ever take high place and precedence on our shelves; and we have no more doubt that a century hence the spectre of *Martha the Gipsy* will haunt the imaginations of our great-grandchildren, while endeavouring to trace out, in the area of some gigantic Grand Junction Railway Station, the site of what once was Bloomsbury Square, than that the narrator of the tale himself would have readily given his last half-crown to any red-cloaked old lady who might have happened to solicit alms after nightfall in that neighbourhood. His literary fame is safe."

Alas! Bloomsbury Square still remains in unblemished respectability, but who knows anything of *Martha the Gipsy*? It was no earlier than 1848 that these words were written, not much more than thirty years ago; but

the literary fame which the writer flattered himself was so "safe" has disappeared like last year's snow. Hook made his appearance in the world, at a very early age, as the author of some farces of the lightest description.

"Gods ! o'er those boards shall Folly rear her head  
Where Garrick trod, and Siddons lives to tread ?  
On those shall Farce display Buffoon'ry's mask,  
And Hook conceal his heroes in a cask ?"

says Byron, sparing nobody in his *English Bards*. Hook had been at Harrow with the noble poet. He lived, as his biographer delights to think, to pay back this satiric line tenfold in the criticisms of the *John Bull*. But in the meantime his youth was in itself a farce in innumerable scenes, full of frolic and mischief, and every wild device by which a young madcap could keep himself and his friends in laughter. His jokes sometimes had issues which were more disagreeable than ridiculous, but he never cared very much for that, and they were innocent enough so long as he was merely a dare-devil boy, balancing on the edge of society, and playing innumerable pranks, in which there was perhaps some serious intention of getting himself into notice as well as the pleasure of the folly itself. In 1812, when he was twenty-four, he got an appointment to a responsible post at the Mauritius, which, but that there was a good income involved, must have evidently been as unsuitable for him as any appointment ever was. But the days of patronage were not then over, and the young scapegrace gaily undertook the office, in which, as a matter of course, from sheer carelessness and incapacity to understand business or anything else that was serious, he fell into great trouble before long. It was natural enough that he who could not manage his own small financial concerns, should soon be proved unable to manage those of a colony, and the failure was so great that he was sent home in half-a-dozen years as a

prisoner, under military escort. This alarming action on the part of the authorities came to little when he got back to London, except a burden of indebtedness which weighed him down for years; but which he managed to shake off somehow or other, though it reappeared like a spectre in his life from time to time. He came back in 1819, and a year after had so far recovered his spirits and freedom that we find him in the full excitement of a new newspaper, the *John Bull*, of which he was partly the originator, and which he conducted at first in mysterious hiding, but afterwards openly for many years. *John Bull* did not originate in a very lofty inspiration. These were the days when Caroline of Brunswick, the shabbiest and least reputable of injured queens, was fighting her poor cause against her still less reputable husband, with a great expenditure of feeling and sympathy on the part of the people, founded rather on horror of him, than any real love for her. The *John Bull* was begun for the purpose of maintaining the cause of the King, by very unsavoury methods, against this unfortunate Princess, who stood in royal George's way; and Hook was in no way superior to this degrading office. When any lady ventured to show herself at the shabby little court where Caroline held such state as was possible, she instantly became a mark for the arrows of this band of shabby assassins. Where all is so pitiful, King and Queen, defenders and assailants, it is hard to know how to characterise this odious mission. All that scurrility and scandal could do was aimed at every individual who entered the doors of Brandenburg House, so that when at length the unhappy Queen died, and got free of her troubles, the *John Bull*, a full-grown London newspaper, tottered in its career and felt its occupation gone. It is not a very noble beginning, neither was the nature noble of the man who thus rushed into the lists in such a cause. But it is difficult for us now to

enter into the fierce and coarse polemics of this conflict, which does not enlist our sympathies on either side—for the Queen was as unattractive a victim as the King was an unelevated oppressor. Hook's novels are not of much higher class than his journalism. They abound in caricature, not even the caricature of invention, but that of actual portraiture, all his broadest sketches being easily identified by those who knew him, and by society in general. They were clever enough to be largely read at the time, but nothing can be more entirely dead than these galvanically vivacious productions are now, nor is there enough even of contemporary life in them to make it worth while to recall them to the reader.

Theodore Hook was distinguished among his contemporaries, still more than by his novels or his journalism, by the curious gift of improvisation which he possessed, and by a taste for the broad farce of mystification, practical jokes played upon all sorts of people, which it needed a dauntless impudence as well as a great deal of ready wit and unbounded cleverness to carry out. Thus he would go and force his way into a dinner party in a house where he was absolutely unacquainted, by the cleverest subterfuges, making himself, as soon as he had got a footing, so amusing and delightful to his host and the party, that the impertinence was more than condoned. All this was very amusing in the doing, and somewhat amusing in the telling, though it soon palls upon the reader; but it is not a very elevated or satisfactory mode of amusement, and few lives could be less dignified or worthy than that of this poor man of letters, this Yorick of infinite fancy and frolic, whose existence was good to nobody, not even to himself. Never was there more festivity and apparent enjoyment, more fun and noise and frivolity, but seldom an existence so barren, with so little to show for the gifts which nature had lavished, and which were but so many more means of



failure to the unfortunate upon whom they fell. He died in 1841 at the age of fifty-three, pitifully pursued by debts and embarrassments to the very edge of the grave.

It has been somewhat difficult to find a place for one of the most characteristic of Scotch novelists—John Galt. With the literary circles in Edinburgh he had not the remotest connection, nor, if we except the moment in which this odd and vulgar Scot, pushing his devious way about the world, crossed the path of Byron, had he any literary associates at all. The early part of his life was spent in what is vaguely called “business,” and in processes of self-culture such as go on among young clerks and working-men of a superior order, and which, though admirable in themselves, rarely qualify the groping student who has thus to stumble along the paths of knowledge without guidance, to instruct the world. Galt was not successful in his early attempts in his office in Greenock, nor does he seem to have been more so in London, whither he removed early in the century, when a young man of five or six and twenty. His account of himself in his *Autobiography* is by no means clear, but gives us a confused picture of commercial embarrassments, meetings of creditors, and other unpleasant accompaniments of failure, amid which his own attitude of cleverness and self-confidence is always pleasing to the narrator. A self-opinionated Scotsman of the vulgar type, shrewd yet reckless, self-admiring, knowing nothing better than his own little world of the Mechanics’ Institute, or local library committee (for perhaps it was too early as yet for Mechanics’ Institutes)—how such a man could have been admitted to the ranks of literature at all would puzzle extremely the reader who, without knowing anything more of Galt, should stumble upon this dull record of himself. When trade failed, however, he took to book.

making, and, travelling for the purpose it would seem—as he might have travelled for the purpose of getting orders in drysaltery, a more likely occupation—met Byron in the East on several occasions by the chances of the road, and formed an acquaintance upon which, at a later period, he presumed to write a life of the poet. This was some time about 1810, when the first cantos of *Childe Harold* were being written. Afterwards Galt went to Canada as agent of a company, and there worked for a number of years, colonising and founding townships, and encouraging emigration, but always thwarted and disapproved of by the authorities at home. It was on his return from this undertaking, unsuccessful as before, when he was about forty and considerably worn by knocking about the world, that he fell, by chance as it would seem, upon the vein of rich metal in his disorderly intellectual possessions.

Up to this time, with a mind little cultivated but full of self-consequence, and an obtuse Scottish incapacity to perceive the things which he could not do, he had written besides his travels, only dramatic productions, which Scott, notwithstanding his constant kindness, characterises as “the worst tragedies that ever were seen.” But at last it seems to have occurred to the always active-minded adventurer to turn his eyes back to the life with which his youth had been familiar—the homely coteries of his native country, the village groups among which he had been born. By what extraordinary magic it was that the man who, writing his own life in precisely the same localities and among the same classes, produces nothing that is not vulgar, wearisome, and commonplace, should the moment he got into the realm of fiction find means to put before us the quaintest group of characters, all real, lifelike, and original, racy of the soil and true to nature, but not vulgar at all—is the most extraordinary

literary miracle: but so it was. The *Ayrshire Legatees*, the *Annals of the Parish*, *The Entail*, and even *Sir Andrew Wyllie*, though the humour of the last is broader and the atmosphere less pure, are in their way wonderful representations of the national life in out-of-the-way corners of Scotland, impossible to be omitted in the literary annals of the country. Galt was not, like Scott, a master of his art; he had none of the genial breadth of observation, the noble comprehension of humanity, which belong to great minds. But what he did know he knew minutely and by heart. His was the simple realism with which imagination has scarcely anything to do; not a record of life read by lights of higher perception and insight, but of facts scarcely modified at all save by the machinery of story-telling. His Mrs. Pringle could, no doubt, have been identified to the very ribbons on her cap: and all the little individualities, so minutely set forth, of every simple but guileful actor on the little scene, belong to the very certainty of primitive life, in no way elevated or idealised, true, yet with a lower kind of truth than that with which the imagination has to do. This sort of portrait-painting, in which there is little harm, perhaps, when the subjects are found in Scotch villages, is in most cases a dangerous craft, and a very poor expedient to replace art. Fortunately it neutralises its own mischievous tendencies by being very rarely successful. But in Galt's best work the imitation of nature is so close, and the life so thoroughly penetrated and known, that the picture almost reaches the higher level of real art.

As was to be expected, the author himself conceived his best efforts to be of a kind more ambitious. His is no fiery spirit intolerant of criticism, and he is willing to accept as much praise as any one will bestow on the simplicities of his Ayrshire stories; but he is still a little wounded that *Ringan Gilhaize*, the story of a martyr-

covenanter, of which he says with an injured tone, "My memory does not furnish me with the knowledge of a novel of the same kind," should not have gained the appreciation which he feels sure it deserved, and that the *Majolo*, a book in which he had endeavoured to make his hero "feel precisely what Buonaparte is reported to have felt," should have been "absolutely neglected" by the public. On the other hand, his "amiable friend the Earl of Blessington" paid him "perhaps the most pleasing compliment" he ever received, by remarking upon the character of Lord Sandford in *Sir Andrew Wyllie*, that "it must be very natural, for in the same circumstances he would have acted in a similar manner," without seeming to have "the least idea that he was himself the model of the character." This was the principle of his work throughout. But the simple wonderment of his group of country folk with their sudden accession of fortune, amid the sights of London—the current of their thoughts, all moulded in the narrowness of the parish, the gleams of mother wit, sometimes ludicrous, sometimes wise, the background of honest goodness never too good, and the unfailing store of "pawky" humour and sense—are in their way as good as anything can be. The miracle is, as we have said, that the very same people are intolerable bores and vulgar nuisances in the real story of his life, whom here in fiction he makes the most amusing companions. Nothing more flat and vulgar than the autobiography, nothing more genuine, humorous, and original than the stories. In this way Galt is a greater wonder than Scott himself.

We will not even attempt to put upon record the number of trashy publications to which Galt's name is attached. Travels, biographies, tragedies, books without number rattled from a pen so commonplace save in one direction, that it is inconceivable why they were published at all;

but among all this dross the one clear streamlet, like a burn in his own homely, tuneful country side, the district which brought Burns into the world as well as this strangely-gifted humourist, goes on with a cheerful tinkle ever worthy the attention of the passer-by, and ever pleasant, fertilising, adorning. A man who has done so much as this has the best of claims upon his country to have all the rest forgotten.

We have omitted to notice among the writers of Scotland a name which, however, like Galt's, is but little connected locally with Scotland, though no more genuine Scot could be, either in his works or sentiments, than Allan Cunningham, "honest Allan," one of those men, peasant-born and but barely educated, who, by dint of something which we must call genius, though not great enough to reach an exalted rank, have made their way out of the fields and workshops into the world of literature. Nothing but that spark of a divinity uncontrollable and subject to no laws, which, like the winds, goes "where it listeth," could account for the appearance here and there of such a simple and stalwart figure, in regions so different from those which brought him forth. Allan Cunningham was all the more remarkable that he not only brought out of a gardener's cottage enough of the faculty of Song to find him a place in the poetic records of his country, but also out of the stonemason's yard some perception of art which made him capable of becoming the trusty assistant and head workman of a great sculptor. His connection with Chantrey is still more remarkable than his connection with literature, for art exacts a harder apprenticeship than has ever been required for authorship. Perhaps it was the faithfulness of the man, and steady devotion, that made him capable for this post, rather than any insight into art. He was the author of several songs which are not unworthy of a place in the

language of Burns, and a great deal of hard-working composition, *Lives of Painters*, and other respectable productions, a *History of Literature Biographical and Critical*, with some novels which will not bear much criticism. "Honest Allan," says Sir Walter Scott of him, "a leal and true Scotchman of the old cast. A man of genius besides, who only requires the tact of knowing when and where to stop, to attain the universal praise which ought to follow it." The sight of such a man in the haunts of authors and artists in London, with his shepherd's plaid over his shoulder, his rustic breeding, and flavour of the soil, is one of the most remarkable in all the circle of strange sights. He had much intercourse with Sir Walter, and with many others of the best men of the day, and was adopted fully into that world so foreign to his race. His songs are the chief things that remain of him. This most simple, but by no means most easy branch of poetical composition has always been a special gift of Scotland, where, at the same time, many voices kindred to "honest Allan's"—those of Lady Nairne, whose fame, like that of Lady Anne Lindsay, depends on one song, of Motherwell, and Tannahill, and several other congenial spirits—were then flourishing. It is with an apology for previous omission that we mention them here. And on the same argument, we may add the name of another Scot of other pretensions, William Tennant, a man of education and literary skill who was not so fortunate as Allan, but lived and died a poor schoolmaster, without ever issuing out of his little native sphere. A long poem in the measure of *Whistlecraft* and *Don Juan*, but preceding both, the subject of which is *Anster Fair* and the heroine Maggie Lauder, could scarcely be carried into fame or the general knowledge except by the greatest gifts of genius. And these Tennant certainly did not possess. But his verse has much of the freedom and flow of the greater productions

in which the same medium was adopted, and has power enough to make the chance reader regret that it had not a little more—enough at least to raise such a skilled manufacture to something more than merely local fame. Where Tennant got the measure we are not informed. That he should have drawn it direct from Pulci and the Italians seems unlikely; but it is at least remarkable that a form of poetry which was afterwards to become so famous should have first stolen into English in this humble and unnoticed way.

THOMAS MOORE, born 1779; died 1852.

Published Translation of Anacreon in 1800.

Little's Poems, 1801.

Odes and Epistles, 1806.

Lalla Rookh, 1817.

The Fudge Family in Paris, 1818.

Rhymes for the Road, 1819.

Loves of the Angels, 1823.

Fables for the Holy Alliance, 1823.

The Epicurean, 1839.

MATTHEW GREGORY LEWIS, born 1775; died 1818.

Published The Monk, 1796.

The Castle Spectre, etc., many Dramatic Works and  
Operas at different times betwixt 1797 and 1812

Tales of Wonder, 1801.

Bravo of Venice, 1804.

Feudal Tyrants.

Tales of Terror.

Romantic Tales.

JAMES SMITH, born 1775; died 1839.

Published Rejected Addresses, 1812.

” ” 22d edition, 1851.

Comic Miscellanies contributed to various periodicals,  
reprinted after his death.

HORACE SMITH, born 1779 ; died 1849.

Published Brambletye House, 1826.

Tor Hill.

Zillah.

Adam Brown, etc.

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THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK, born 1785 ; died 1866.

Published Headlong Hall, 1816.

Melincourt, 1817.

Nightmare Abbey, 1818.

Rhododaphne.

Maid Marian, 1822.

Misfortunes of Elphin, 1829.

Crotchet Castle, 1831.

Gryll Grange, 1860.

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THEODORE EDWARD HOOK, born 1788 ; died 1841.

Published A number of Farces and Operettas between  
1805 and 1821.

Sayings and Doings (first series), 1824.

" " (second series), 1825.

" " (third series), 1828.

Reminiscences of Michael Kelly, 1826.

Maxwell, 1830.

Life of Sir David Baird, 1832.

The Parson's Daughter, 1833.

Jack Brag, 1837.

Births, Deaths, and Marriages, 1839.

Love and Pride, 1833.

Gilbert Gurney, 1835.

Gurney Married, 1839.

He continued to publish Novels and Magazine

Articles to the end of his life.

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JOHN GALT, born 1779 ; died 1839.

Published The Ayrshire Legatees, 1820.

Annals of the Parish, 1821.

Sir Andrew Wylie, 1822.

The Provost, 1822.



Published The Entail, 1823.  
The Steamboat.  
Ringan Gilhaize.  
The Spaewife.  
Lawrie Todd.  
The Owner, 1824.  
Bogle Corbet, 1831.  
And many others.

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ALLAN CUNNINGHAM, born 1784 ; died 1843.  
Published Several Songs in Cromek's Remains of Nithsdale and  
Galloway Song, 1810.  
Sir Marmaduke Maxwell, 1822.  
Paul Jones.  
Lives of Painters.  
History of Literature.

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WILLIAM TENNANT, born 1785 ; died 1848.  
Published Anster Fair, 1812.

## CHAPTER VI.

MARIA EDGEWORTH—JANE AUSTEN—SUSAN FERRIER.

THERE is a curious symbolism in the names which stand at the head of this page—three women representing with great fitness the three countries that form Great Britain, all writing the same language, and embodying to a great extent the same ideal, yet revealing each the characteristics of her race in a manner as amusing as it is instructive. Miss Ferrier, the youngest of the group, was somewhat cast into shade by the apparition, close beside her, of the greatest of novelists, yet, nevertheless, kept her place and reputation notwithstanding Sir Walter. The others held undisturbed possession of the field, and were each supreme on her own ground. Novel-writing—though we are apt to say that it never attained such general extension as now—has always been a popular art, and perhaps at no period since literature began to have a history, did it ever happen that the story-teller was absent from the beadroll. But there had been a lull after Richardson and Fielding, and their successor Smollett. The two latter, we presume, making every allowance for the change of manners, never could have been considered suitable for domestic reading: and the gradual development of an ever-increasing audience brought necessities with it which probably had some occult power in quickening the feminine imagination, and calling into being that pure-minded and delicate art which

was found to the amazement of all beholders to be capable of delighting and amusing the public without infringing the finest standard of morals. Richardson had meant well—he had supposed and everybody had said that *Pamela* was the support of virtue, an example for womankind. But neither Fielding nor Smollett was solicitous about virtue. They were “robust” masters of the art of fiction, with no sort of affectation about them; their books were not meant for the women—and probably at that period women were not very much considered in the audience to which writers in general addressed themselves. But a change had evidently come about in this respect at the end of last century. Whether it was Rousseau and the French Revolution who did it, or whether it was the waking up in divers places of such genius among women as creates its own audience and works its own revolution, it is difficult to tell. Mary Wollstonecraft, who was the most likely to be influenced by these foreign powers, wrote bad stories in the old style, and probably Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen knew very little of Rousseau. It is as hard to decide how they were produced as it is to trace any other awakening of a new thing in poetry or art. They were as much a new source of life and meaning as were the poets their contemporaries, and arose—because it was in them—mysteriously out of the gentle darkness, each a particular star.

It is curious to note the difference between their contemporary Mrs. Inchbald and these ladies of the new light. *The Strange Story*, with its graceful talent and individuality, belongs to the eighteenth century altogether. It deals with no definable development of human nature, and has in it no real study of life. It is a surprise to us to realise that *Pride and Prejudice* was actually written earlier than that curious romance, though it did not till some time after see the light. Mrs. Inchbald is of the

past, and her production is almost archaic; but Jane Austen belongs to humanity in all periods, and Miss Edgeworth is even more clearly natural and practical. The life of average human nature swept by no violence of passions, disturbed by no volcanic events, came suddenly uppermost in the works of these women as it had never done before. Miss Austen in particular, the greatest and most enduring of the three, found enough in the quiet tenor of life which fell under her own eyes to interest the world. Without ever stepping out from the shelter of home, or calling to her help a single incident that might not have happened next door, she held the reader, if not breathless, yet in that pleased and happy suspension of personal cares and absorption of amused interest, which is the very triumph of fiction. She had not even a new country to reveal like Miss Edgeworth, or a quaint and obscure region of odd manners and customs like Miss Ferrier. She had nothing to say that England did not know, and no exhibition of highly-wrought feeling, or extraordinary story to tell. The effect she produced was entirely novel, without any warrant or reason, except the ineffable and never-to-be-defined reason of genius which made it possible to turn all those commonplace events into things more interesting than passion. It would be difficult to find anything nearer witchcraft and magic. Why we should be so much amused and delighted by matters of such ordinary purport, and why a tiresome old woman or crotchety old man, whom, in real life, we would avoid, should become in print an exquisite diversion, is one of the most unaccountable of literary phenomena. But so it is. And as we mark the growth and rise of the new flood of noble poetry at the meeting-point of the two centuries, we should be negligent of one of the first duties of a historian if we did not note likewise the sudden development of purely feminine genius at the same great

era. Female writers have never been wanting. In the dimmest ages there has always been one here and there adding a mild, often a feeble, soprano to the deeper tenor of the concert. How it is that these have never risen to the higher notes and led the strain, as the feminine voice does in music, we need not inquire. Women are very heavily weighted for any race, but it can scarcely be that circumstances account for an inferiority so continual. But the opening of an entirely feminine strain of the highest character and importance—a branch of art worthy and noble, and in no way inferior, yet quite characteristically feminine, must, we think, be dated here in the works of these three ladies. Women's books before had either been echoes of those of men, or weakly womanish, addressed to "the fair" like so many productions of the eighteenth century. The three sister novelists who came to light in the beginning of the nineteenth, were, in their own way, as remarkable and individual as Scott or Fielding, and opened up for women after them a new and characteristic path in literature.

Miss Edgeworth was the first to appear in the field, and she had the advantage of an altogether new and untrodden ground. She was born in 1767, the eldest child of the gay young philosopher referred to by Miss Anna Seward, the husband of the beautiful Honora Sneyd, and of various other charming women, but whose chief distinction is that he was the father of his daughter. Maria was the child of his first marriage—a marriage contracted before he was twenty, and soon ended. Three wives and three families followed, and the house at Edgeworthstown was a very full one; but Mr. Edgeworth and his eldest daughter seem to have been each other's most tender and faithful friends through all the many incidents of his life. He was a man full of whims and crotchets and boundless self-confidence, fond of writing, and occupying himself

busily in systems of education and benevolent conspiracies of all kinds for the public good. Byron, when he met the great novelist and her father in London, gave vent to a witty saying which characterises them very cleverly. *She* looked, he thought, the simplest of ordinary little women, as if she could scarcely write her own name, while *he*, on the contrary, looked as if nothing else was worth writing—an admirable description. One or two somewhat laborious treatises, on *Practical Education*, on *Irish Bulls*—are said to be the joint production of father and daughter, and Miss Edgeworth herself has left it on record that she had recourse to her father's ready wit and invention in all her difficulties. "I am sure," she says, "that I should never have written or finished anything without his support." Many of her books are introduced by a little address from him full of genial self-complacency, as of a man who felt himself the author not only of the books but of the mind that produced them, and consequently deserving of double credit. "My daughter," he says with an evident roll of satisfaction in his voice, "asks me for a preface to the following volumes: from a pardonable weakness she calls upon me for parental protection: but in fact the public judges of every work not from the sex, but from the merit of the author." The crow of the cock, stepping gallantly out in front of his womankind, has been not unfrequently reproduced by proud yet semi-apologetic relatives introducing the works of female authors to the world.

Maria Edgeworth was a half-grown girl, at the moment when observation is most vivid, when she was taken from England, where she had been born, and up to her thirteenth year educated, to her home in Ireland; and no doubt the contrast struck her with wonderful keenness and force. It is a scene she is fond of repeating. Lord Glenthorn in *Ennui* and the young Lord Colambre in the *Absentee*, are both led through the amusing experiences

of an arrival, from all the prejudices and decorums of England into the very heart of the reckless, thriftless, contented, witty, scheming, and faithful population of the unknown country; from which they both have derived their means without any knowledge of either the land or the people. No doubt her own recollections gave force and animation to the picture. It was not, however, through the means of a youthful hero and captivating Irish heroine—personages whose charms literature has always been ready to acknowledge—that Miss Edgeworth first opened up this unexplored and novel region to the public. Her first work had no enlivening of youthful love, no cheerful hopes of amelioration to recommend and soften the picture. *Castle Rackrent*, which was her first publication (in 1801), and which is one of the most powerful and impressive of her books, is devoted to the miserable story of improvidence, recklessness, and folly, by which so many families have been ruined, and which is linked with so much that is attractive in the way of generosity and hospitality and open-handedness, that the hardest critic is mollified unawares, and the sympathetic populace, which is no adept in moral criticism, admires with enthusiasm while he lasts, and pities, when he has fallen, the culprit who is emphatically nobody's enemy but his own.

The story is told by an Irish retainer, faithful to his master to the very death, and though heartbroken when ruin comes, as proud of the lavish prodigality and beneficence of the house, and even of its wild waste and profusion, as if these had been the chief claims of "the family" to honour. It was a bold proceeding upon the part of a young author to stake her fortune upon a book in which there was neither love nor marriage, nor any of the well-worn romantic expedients for holding the reader's attention. It is the story of the ruin of a family, gradu-

ally worked out as it descends from generation to generation with a power which is at once amusing and tragical. There are incidents in the story which it is to be hoped were not common even in the worst state of Ireland, such as that of the imprisonment in her own house of Sir Kit's wife, but this powerful picture has been generally accepted as a true rendering of the miserable existence and downfall of many a house. The "family" is one of high descent and pretensions, with a very good estate in possession, and the *éclat* of a much finer one which had been theirs, and which still gives them a right to think themselves the first people in the district. It is free of the usual inconvenience of a large number of sons and daughters, for the prevailing recklessness of the race, and its constant need of money, leads one representative after another into a loveless or repugnant marriage, and not an heir is born so long as we follow its history in the ungenial house. From first to last an endless and aimless prodigality is the rule, with the one exception of the second baronet to whom we are introduced, Sir Murtagh, who represents the reverse sin of avarice, and who with his wife is continually grinding and crushing the people, exacting every kind of gift and profit from them. This pair are remorselessly drawn. "This for certain," says Old Thady, the hanger-on who tells the tale, "the new man did not take at all after the old gentleman: the cellars were never filled after his death, and no open house, or anything as it used to be, the tenants even were sent away without their whisky. I was ashamed myself, and did not know what to say for the honour of the family, but I made the best of a bad case, and laid it all at my lady's door, for I did not like her anyhow, nor anybody else. . . . I always suspected she had Scotch blood in her veins." Sir Murtagh and his lady manage their estate in a manner which affords an excellent contrast to the dissipation of the others, and



throws also a curious light upon the habits of the period. The description reads something like the exactions of a grand seigneur in France before the Republic. The table at the castle was kept provided with "duty fowls, duty turkies, and duty geese . . . for what with fear of driving for the rent, or Sir Murtagh's lawsuits, they (the tenants) were kept in such order, they never thought of coming near the hall without a present of something or other."

"As for their young pigs, we had them, and the best bacon and ham they could make up, with all young chickens in spring; but they were a set of poor wretches, and we had nothing but misfortunes with them, always breaking and running away. This, Sir Murtagh and my Lady said, was all their former landlord, Sir Patrick's fault, who let 'em all get the half-year's rent into arrear. There was something in that, to be sure. But Sir Murtagh was as much the contrary way; for let alone making English tenants of them, every soul, he was always driving and driving, and pounding and pounding, and canting and canting, and replevying and replevying, and he made a good living of trespassing cattle; there was always some tenant's pig, or horse, or cow, or calf, or goose trespassing, which was so great a gain to Sir Murtagh that he did not like to hear me talk of repairing fences. Then his heriots and duty work brought him in something, his turf was cut, his potatoes set and dug, his hay brought home, and, in short, all the work about his house done for nothing; for in all our leases there were strict clauses heavy with penalties, which Sir Murtagh knew well how to enforce; so many days' duty work of man and horse from every tenant he was to have and had every year; and when a man vexed him, why, the finest day he could pitch on, when the cratur was getting in his own harvest, or thatching his cabin, Sir Murtagh made it a principle to call upon him and his horse; so he taught 'em all, as he said, to know the law of landlord and tenant."

This was in the happy days when Ireland had a parliament of her own, and home rule was unbroken: and under a landlord native to the soil, a descendant of the old kings, one of the same race and same creed as the unhappy dependants whose blood he sucked. But with all these exactions and robberies the landlord did not

thrive. "He used to boast that he had a lawsuit for every letter in the alphabet," and out of forty-nine suits "he never lost one, but seventeen," which was his way of throwing away his substance. Sir Murtagh died of passion in a quarrel with his wife "about an abatement," and his younger brother reigned in his stead. "A fine life we should have led," says Thady, "had he staid among us—God bless him! He valued a guinea as little as any man; money to him was no more than dirt, and his gentleman and groom, and all belonging to him, the same." Sir Kit, however, found Castle Rackrent dull, and "went off in a whirlwind to town," leaving everything to his agent, and keeping up a continual demand for money. "He had the spirit of a prince, and lived away, to the honour of his country, abroad, which I was proud to hear of." The state of things under the rule of the agent, and the constant drafts for money of the owner, are described as follows:—

"He ferreted the tenants out of their lives; not a week without a call for money, drafts upon drafts from Sir Kit; but I laid it all to the fault of the agent; for, says I, what can Sir Kit do with so much cash, and he a single man? But still it went, Rents must be paid up to the day, and afore; no allowance for improving tenants, no consideration for those who had built upon their farms: no sooner was a lease out, but the land was advertised to the highest bidder, all the old tenants turned out, when they spent their substance in the hope and trust of a renewal from the landlord. All was now set at the highest penny to a parcel of poor wretches, who meant to run away, and did so, after taking two crops out of the ground."

Amid all this Miss Edgeworth gives scarcely any indication of disturbance among the peasants, or secret societies, or any attempt at agitation. To be sure, there was an insurrection breeding, the unfortunate attempt of '98, during the period embraced by her story, of which she gives some small incidental account in another work,

representing the country folk, however, as but little and very superficially agitated, and the tremendous burdens upon them in respect to their occupation of the land as wholly inoperative in the matter. Whether she is a competent authority or not on this point we cannot tell; but she was an eye-witness, and knew what she was talking about.

Sir Kit got out of his difficulties by marrying an ugly Jewess, whom he shut up in her room for some years, because she refused to give up her jewels to him; till he was finally shot in a duel, to the great grief of the whole country side. "He was never cured of his gaming tricks; but that was the only fault he had, God bless him," says the pious Thady. He was succeeded by Sir Conolly (or Condry for short), who was "the most universally beloved man I had ever seen or heard of," and whose story of wild waste at once of money and affections and life is so complete, and the gleams of honourable feeling that flash out of the wretchedness of his bankrupt condition, so affecting—that the reader is touched by the pitiful tale, and notwithstanding his whisky punch, the smell of which revolts his unloved wife, and the madness of his hopeless career altogether, regards with a pang the miserable end of the spendthrift, who falls a victim at last to whisky and misery in a wretched little house, whither he has retired, after making over his castle to Jason O'Quirk, the too-quickwitted son of old Thady, who has grown upon his master's misfortunes, as wicked attorneys do everywhere. The reckless poor gentleman, who forestalls his inheritance, by advances, before he has got it, and begins a great deal worse than nothing: who is swept into a marriage he has no desire to make, and which is decided at last by the toss of a halfpenny: and who will not be troubled about his expenses or about anything else in the world, but floats on helpless to

destruction, and dies at last of a drunken bot, is contemptible enough from every moral point of view; but the love and admiration and sorrow of the faithful old retainer, who tells the tale—the remnants of a higher nature in the victim—and the utter misery and tragic sweep of fate with which he is carried away, have a heart-rending effect.

“There was none but my shister and myself left near him of all the friends he had. The fever came and went and lasted five days; and the sixth he was sensible and said to me, knowing me very well, ‘I’m in burning pain all withinside of me, Thady.’ I could not speak, but my shister asked him would he have this thing or t’other to do him good? ‘No,’ says he ‘nothing will do me good now;’ and he gave a terrible screech with the torture he was in—then again a minute’s ease—‘Brought to this by drink,’ says he. ‘Where are all the friends?—Where’s Judy?—Gone, hey? Ay, Sir Condy has been a fool all his days,’ said he; and this was the last word he spoke, and died. He had but a poor funeral after all.”

The young author who began her career by a tragedy so homely yet so profound as this must have been as courageous as she was able. It was a revelation of the deepest of national disabilities, a type of character so wayward yet so winning, so hopelessly facile, so obstinate and immovable, so generous and so selfish, that the moralist could but stand by in despair and feel the impotence of all exertion. In her other Irish stories which followed, Miss Edgeworth took advantage of a more attractive plot, and of the more ordinary *motif* of romance—the perennial love-story. In *Ennui* we have a number of pictures more cheerful but equally characteristic, the humours of the peasant being more entertaining, and even in his worst development of thriftless *insouciance* never so hopeless as the follies of his master; while in the *Absentee* we are permitted to hope for a remedy of all evils, and rapid substitution of a heaven upon earth for the wretchedness

of the agent's remorseless sway, by so easy an expedient as the return of the absentee family. The novelty of the circumstances set before us in these studies, and the dissimilarity of many points in the Irish character to the experiences of the English reader, never hinder our recognition of the life and nature which make the whole world kin. The shiftless careless cotter, sitting content with the squalor of his lot, and embarrassed only by the botheration of all attempts to better it: full of gratitude, affection, and faithfulness to all natural ties: far happier in the dash and daring of a hairbreadth escape than in national security and good order; touched with instantaneous impulses for good or evil, ready in understanding and still more ready in wit—who has for all this time been our favourite type of the Irish peasant, is chiefly Miss Edgeworth's creation; and nobody before her had revealed the fine gentleman, gallant, handsome, and manly, but as indolent of mind as the cotter, and letting everything go with still more fatal facility, whose pitiful consciousness of something better in him is never extinguished even by the low vices and degraded company to which he falls, but never does anything more for him than gild the ruin of his hopes and prospects. Nor has this exponent of national character failed to see the stealthy treachery which is the reverse side of the instinctive, spaniel-like, uncritical devotion of the race, or the bitter avarice and grasping acquisitiveness which varies the profusion and prodigality of the spendthrift. What Miss Edgeworth failed in was the gift of throwing a romantic and elevating interest over her country as Sir Walter did for his. She interests and excites the reader, but sets before him no picture which he longs to see, no society which he would like to join. There are no historical associations to attract him, and little but the painful problems of social misery to solve. Though she

writes with genuine love for her country, she communicates no enthusiasm for it. To be sure, enthusiasm had little or no existence in her own perfectly well-balanced and over-educated soul.

The Tales in which Miss Edgeworth took upon her to expound the world of fashion are less successful than her national sketches, but many of them are well worth reading; and if it is difficult to believe in the grossness of the dandy as shown in some of her sketches of a period so recent as the beginning of this century, the sprightly graces of her heroines, and the admirable good sense which they display in all the entanglements of their respective stories, are always agreeable. Her *Tales for Children* and *Parent's Assistant* enjoyed an enormous popularity, which has not lasted, we fear. Probably the virtues of the model young persons whom she holds up to the admiration of the youthful world are too matter-of-fact to please a young imagination. Our sympathy perversely goes astray from Ben, who buys a comfortable greatcoat, to Harry, who chooses a green and white archery uniform instead; and we are less angry with Rosamond for admiring the purple jar in the chemist's window than with her mother for permitting the child to buy it. Good sense and practical education are admirable things, but they may be carried too far. It was the lot, however, of Maria Edgeworth to be trained in one of those somewhat appalling family seminaries of all the virtues, where nothing escapes the system of education, and everything is made subservient to the moral discipline of the house. It is scarcely fair, however, to assert—as is so often done—that her imagination is deficient, that she has no enthusiasm, nor anything more elevated in her than the dominion of plain sense, and the honesty which is the best policy. We have already indicated the tragedy of *Castle Rackrent*, where she has succeeded,

amid details of petty and even vulgar vice, in giving such touches both of pity and terror as raise the miserable drama to poetic rank. She never again strikes quite so high a note, but the picture of King Corney in *Ormond* is as striking and full of pathos as that of Sir Condry. Perhaps her admirable papa, who cut and carved her manuscripts at his will, declaring that to write was her part, and to amend and criticise his, may have subdued her tragic vein.

But nothing can be more pleasant than the picture she has left us of the close communion and partnership which existed so long between her father and herself. Sometimes it was he who invented the stories, and she who wrote them down—as was the case in respect to her tale of *Patronage*, it must be allowed one of the least successful of her productions, and the most open to the charge of flatness and matter-of-fact treatment. But ordinarily it was she who brought her skeleton tale to her father, to be by him considered and weighed in the critical balance. She lived at home in all the freedom and cheerfulness of the large and full household; seeing wife succeed wife in the government of the mansion, and family after family fill up the many rooms. The younger daughters, children of Mrs. Honora or Mrs. Elizabeth, were married or died in their bloom; but Maria still lived peacefully on, her father's companion and counsellor, growing quietly into maturity, till, no doubt, in her gentle and ripe maidenhood, she became the elder of the two, a sort of indulgent senior to that ever energetic, ever active personage who was capable of so many loves, and renewed his youth periodically in a new marriage. They must have got to be something like brother and sister as she grew old and he young, marrying at fifty-four a lady who was younger than Maria. But nothing seems to have impaired their tender union, or the warm and cheerful placidity of the family life.

Her books were received with great favour, and her reputation at once reached the highest place. "Without being so presumptuous as to hope to emulate the rich humour, pathetic tenderness, and admirable tact which pervade the works of my accomplished friend," said Sir Walter Scott in the preface to the *Waverley Novels*—when, after so long a period of concealment, he at last revealed himself publicly to the world which had guessed his secret so long—"I felt that something might be attempted for my own country of the same kind with that which Miss Edgeworth so fortunately achieved for Ireland—something which might introduce the natives to those of the sister kingdom in a more favourable light than they had been placed hitherto;" and he describes "the extended and well-merited fame of Miss Edgeworth, whose Irish characters have gone so far to make the English familiar with the character of their gay and kindhearted neighbours, that she may truly be said to have done more towards completing the Union than perhaps all the legislative enactments by which it has been followed up," as one of the inducements which led him to complete and publish *Waverley*. The sincere compliment of imitation could not have been paid in a nobler way; and one of the prettiest episodes in the too-hospitable life at Abbotsford is the visit of Miss Edgeworth to her great contemporary.

"The next month—August 1823—was one of the happiest in Scott's life," writes Lockhart. "Never did I see a brighter day at Abbotsford than that on which Miss Edgeworth first arrived there. . . . The weather was beautiful, and the edifice, and its appurtenances, were all but complete; and day after day, so long as she could remain, her host had always some new plan of gaiety. One day there was fishing on the Cauldshields Loch and a dinner on the heathy bank. Another, the whole party feasted by Thomas the Rhymers' waterfall, in the Glen—and the stone on which Maria that day sat was ever afterwards called Edgeworth's Stone. A third



day we had to go further afield. He must needs show her, not Newark alone, but all the upper scenery of the Yarrow, where 'fair hangs the apple frae the rock;' and the baskets were unpacked about sunset, beside the ruined chapel overlooking St. Mary's Loch: and he had scrambled to gather bluebells and heath-flowers, with which all the young ladies must twine their hair,—and they sang, and he recited, until it was time to go home beneath the softest of harvest moons. Thus a fortnight was passed—and the vision closed; for Miss Edgeworth never saw Abbotsford again."

While Maria Edgeworth was growing into maturity in her Irish home, frightened by the rebellion, but never losing her faith in her countrymen, a younger girl in an English rectory in Hampshire, with nothing about her beyond the calmest everyday circumstances, began, quite unprovoked by outward stimulation, to exercise a gift still finer and more subtle than that of her Irish contemporary. Jane Austen, who was born in 1775, was eight years younger than Miss Edgeworth. She was a shy and quiet girl, with the keenest insight and gently cynical penetration, hidden under a pretty humour and softly trenchant banter. The way in which she tenderly laughs at, and turns outside in, the young nephew to whom she addresses some pretty letters, published in the little anecdotal memoir not long since given to the world, betrays her use in private life of the keen and exquisite derision which is one of her favourite weapons in her art. She was only about twenty in her sheltered and happy life at home in the end of the old century, when she wrote what might have been the outcome of the profoundest prolonged observation and study of mankind—what is, we think, the most perfect of all her works—*Pride and Prejudice*. It must have been in her father's parish, in the easy intercourse of village or rural life, that she saw, probably without knowing she saw, so many varieties of human nature. No feasible inducement was before her to bring this strange endowment to

life; no hothouse training in moralities and the creed of universal instructiveness; no restless literary papa to set her an example; no unknown society or manners to reveal. An excellent ordinary strain of honest gentlefolks, peaceably tedious and undistinguished, and anxious to make it apparent that their Jane knew nothing of literary people, and was quite out of any possibility of association with such a ragged regiment, was the family that gave her birth. She wrote—no one can tell why—out of native instinct, preferring that way of amusing herself to fine needlework,—telling stories, as Burns rhymed, “for fun,” with no ulterior views. She was pretty, sprightly, well taken care of—a model English girl, simple, and saucy, and fair. It is almost impossible to imagine that she who traced all the vicissitudes of long and faithful love in the delicate and womanly soul of Anne Elliot can have been entirely without such experiences in her own person; but if so, her life shows no trace of the hidden episode, and all is plain and unexciting and matter-of-fact in the little record. Her success in her lifetime is said to have been small, and her own eagerness about the reception of her books scarcely rises above the little girlish excitement of a successful mystification, as when *Pride and Prejudice* is read aloud to a serene rural auditor, without any hint of the authorship, and Miss Jane exults in the interest aroused. The girlishness of her own estimate throughout is as amusing as any of her characters. “Fanny’s praise is very gratifying,” she writes. “Her liking Darcy and Elizabeth is enough; she might hate all the others if she would.” How Miss Austen would have delighted to draw with delicate malicious touches the pretty young authoress, careful of the effect to be produced by her lovers, and quite unconscious of the superiority of “the others,” the wonderful Pennet family, the

ever-to-be-remembered Mr. Collins, and all the infinite humours of that little world! At the same time there is this warrant for that innocent bit of sentimental preference, that Miss Austen's lovers, at least in this book, have a character and individuality much superior to most of the *jeunes premiers* we meet in fiction. Darcy is not a mere walking gentleman or Elizabeth a featureless angel; but it brings us very near to the young woman who, in her girlish innocence, must have been little more than the handmaiden and secretary of her own genius, to find her pretty Elizabeth, the high-spirited bright girl in whom, no doubt, her own young ideal was expressed, so near to her heart. "I must confess," she says, "that I think her as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print, and how I shall be able to tolerate those who do not like *her* at least, I do not know."

These lines were written when the book was published, when Miss Austen had reached the maturity of thirty; but the work itself was written before she was twenty-one, and no doubt had been frequently lingered over during those eventful ten years of life in which the story of youth and romance is generally lived through one way or other. *Sense and Sensibility* followed immediately, then *Northanger Abbey*. We doubt much whether three such works, so full of natural insight, and what, for want of a better title, we call knowledge of human nature, were ever produced at so early an age by any other writer, male or female, since the world began. Jane Austen, the rector of Steventon's daughter, could not have any knowledge of the world. She must, no doubt, have paid at least one visit to "the Bath," and seen with lively bright youthful eyes John Thorpe driving about in his high gig, and sat through a wistful evening by the side of some good-humoured chaperon, who wished, like Mrs. Allen, that they knew 'somebody; but

this little experience probably was the extent of outdoor knowledge possessed by the country girl. And who can tell by what witchery it was that she divined the rest?

"She had no separate study to retire to," says her biographer, "and most of her work must have been done in the general sitting-room, subject to all kinds of casual interruptions." Thus it was a very different scene from that of the Irish mansion, full of children and systems of education, where everybody was being trained from morning till night, and where Maria Edgeworth carried the skeleton of her tales to her father to be approved of, or handed the MS. over to him to be pruned and cut down—in which this young Englishwoman let loose her youthful genius. In the Rectory parlour, where Mrs. Austen and Cassandra sat at their needlework, and all the little parties of the neighbourhood would be discussed, and the girls' new bonnets settled upon, Jane, at her "little mahogany writing-desk," at one side of the table, was in the full tide of all the little nothings that make up the gentle tenor of daily life in the country. No doubt, she was the first to see, glancing up in the middle of a sentence, Miss Bates coming up the little avenue with her budget of village news—and would stop and play with her pen, and make her little caustic remark, with glee in her eyes, as the good woman ran on with a hundred breaks and lapses: or pause and come back out of the midst of the Bennets to join in the discussion soon reproduced in her manuscript, as to whether the horses could be spared to take the ladies into the little town, with a full sense of the seriousness of the question. Can any one doubt that Jane had to run away from her desk and leave the half-written page to be fluttered by the sweet-smelling air blowing in from the garden, to do a dozen little errands, that her sister might not be disturbed in the middle of her fine buttonholes, or at the crisis of a

piece of fancy-work? The girl might have taken to worsted work instead, and probably there would not have been much difference in the two pursuits, so far as anybody knew; but by and by it would begin to be understood that it was amusing to hear what Jane had been writing, and how far Darcy and Elizabeth had got in their affairs. She would do a little dressmaking by intervals, and work a bag for a present, with a pretty housewife full of silks and needles in it, and a little copy of verses in the pocket, so neatly written out that it was a pleasure to see. No doubt the rector's wife was vexed at first that the child should be so idle, scribbling instead of doing her needlework—but always so ready to look up from her writing and nod her pretty curls, and set them laughing with those little merry speeches of hers, and her sweet little laugh at everybody, who could find fault with her? Probably when it came to be ascertained that a book was the issue of all these harmless scribblings, this, after the first movement of incredulity, would be the best joke of all. It seems very likely that a feeling on the part of her parents that publishing a book would be something of a stigma on their young daughter, kept *Pride and Prejudice* in manuscript for ten years. It is not so stated, but in these days publishing a book was a doubtful advantage to a rector's daughter, and might have been looked upon in the county society with no favourable eye.

The character of these books is too well known to require description. Of Miss Edgeworth, whose fame in her life was greater, we feel at liberty to indicate several special points in her stories; but who needs to be told about the Bennets in that wonderful, dingy, old-fashioned country house, with the father in his library, slipshod but caustic, contemptuous of his silly girls and their still more silly mother: and Mrs. Bennet, so ready to espouse

the cause of the silliest, too opaque to understand her husband's jeers, but not to feel the grievance of them: and stolid Mary, always ready to oblige the company with another song; and Mr. Collins, who thinks it incumbent upon him, as heir of entail, to marry one of the Miss Bennets, and who understands so well that no elegant female can be expected to say yes at once? The whole little landscape rises before us—the country town where the officers are so constant an object of interest, the girls' delight in watching them from their aunt's window, the muddy country roads, the little entertainments, the new people who laugh at the rustics, and all the flutter and chatter and speculation about young Mr. Bingley and Miss Jane. Miss Bingley and her sister are a trifle vulgar,—the only approach in the book to that danger,—and probably reflect some town intruders, whom the rector's daughter had noted with keen enjoyment in their condescending notice of her friends and herself. Everything is told with the most delightful impartiality and good humour, but with a pleasure in the exhibition of all these follies, which is not perhaps so amiable as the young writer was. Except in Elizabeth, and her favourite sister Jane, the too-sweet and pliable heroine, no ideal figure finds a place in this young woman's work. She takes her fun out of the father and mother without a scrap of hesitation, and laughs at everybody all round, even her hero, who deserves it, though he comes at the end so nobly out of his troubles. One wonders whether there was anywhere about, near Steventon, a Lady Catherine, who permitted the parson to make up her card-table, and insulted him and all his belongings. We are driven back to search for the real originals, who probably never existed, of these characters, out of sheer inability to conceive how the country girl of twenty could have found such varieties of human mind and temper in

her own young imagination. *Sense and Sensibility* is perhaps not so difficult. The gushing girl is never far to seek, and though it is almost impossible to imagine anything so utterly rash, and unpractical, and deluded as Marianne and her mother, yet there is much less that is wonderful in the production of such a tale of sentimental complications in the parlour of Steventon Rectory than in the brilliant and varied picture of character and life which preceded it.

*Northanger Abbey* is once more on the higher level. Such a picture of delightful youth, simplicity, absurdity, and natural sweetness, it is scarcely possible to parallel. Catherine Morland, with all her enthusiasm and her mistakes, her modest tenderness and right feeling, and the fine instinct which runs through her simplicity, is the most captivating picture of a very young girl which fiction, perhaps, has ever furnished. Her biographer informs us that when Miss Austen was very young she amused herself with writing burlesques, "ridiculing the improbable events and exaggerated sentiments which she had met with in sundry silly romances." It is to be hoped that he did not rank the *Mysteries of Udolpho* among these silly romances; for certainly it is with no ungenial criticism that the young author describes the effect upon her Catherine's ingenuous mind of the mysterious situations and thrilling incidents in the books she loves. It is, on a small scale, like the raid of Cervantes upon the books of chivalry which were so dear to him, and which the simple reader believes, and the heavy critic assures him, that great romancer wrote *Don Quixote* to overthrow. Miss Austen makes her laughing assault upon Mrs. Radcliffe with all the affectionate banter of which she was mistress — the genial fun and tender ridicule of a mind which in its day had wondered and worshipped like Catherine. And she makes that innocent creature

ridiculous, but how lovable all through !—letting us laugh at her indeed, but tenderly, as we do at the follies of our favourite child. All her guileless thoughts are open before us—her half-childish love, her unconscious candour, her simplicity and transparent truth. The gentle fun is of the most exquisite description, fine and keen, yet as soft as the touch of a dove. The machinery of the story is wonderfully bad, and General Tylney an incredible monster ; but all the scenes in Bath—the vulgar Thorpes, the good-humoured Mrs. Allen—are clear and vivid as the daylight, and Catherine herself throughout always the most delightful little gentlewoman, never wrong in instinct and feeling, notwithstanding all her amusing foolishness.

These three works were the productions of Jane Austen's youth. Out of timidity or fastidiousness, or the reluctance of her family to identify her with anything so equivocal as authorship, they were not published for nearly ten years, the first appearing in 1811. Whether they passed through her hands again during this interval there is no information. The wonderful polish and finish of the work would make any amount of revision seem possible ; but we think it very doubtful that there was much revision. It does not accord with what we know of the circumstances that she should have been turning over, refining and re-refining, all in the family parlour with the common life around her at every point and on every side. Indeed, it would seem that the first manuscript was cautiously offered to a publisher so early as 1797, but was declined ; and still worse, that *Northanger Abbey* was sold to a bookseller in Bath for £10 : “ But it found so little favour in his eyes that he chose to abide by his first loss rather than risk expense by publishing such a work ! ” and kept our beloved Catherine in a drawer till the author, having achieved her first modest success, bought the manuscript back again. Probably it



was these discouragements after all which kept the books in her hands for so many years.

After a long pause, however—during which she was more in the world, living in Bath and Southampton, and presumably occupied with positive existence more than with imagination—the publication of her first work, and her settlement once more in the country, seem to have re-awakened the dormant faculty; and between 1811 and 1816 she wrote *Mansfield Park*, the longest, and, we think, least valuable of her books, and the far more admirable *Emma* and *Persuasion*, both masterpieces. *Emma*, perhaps, is the work upon which most suffrages would meet as the most perfect of all her performances. It is again the story of a girl, full of mistakes and foolishness, but of a girl very different from Catherine Morland. That delightful little maiden was very young, very simple, at the age when life is all one sweet wonder and surprise to the novice; but Emma is more mature and her own mistress, used to a certain supremacy, and to know her own importance and feel herself a power in her little world. Perhaps the author has scarcely the same sympathy for her that she had for her younger heroine, for some of Emma's mistakes are sharply punished, and her own movements of self-reproach and self-conviction are very keen; but then her errors are of a graver kind altogether, and involve the comfort of others, as only the actions of an important personage with some responsibility, on her shoulders could do. But Emma's wilful womanhood, and her busy schemes and plans for the settlement of other people's fortunes, are scarcely less attractive than the infantine freshness of Catherine: and the group round her are drawn—we would say with greater perfection of experience and knowledge of the world, did we not remember that *Pride and Prejudice*, the first of the series, was as wealthy and varied in character.

But, at least, if *Emma* is little advanced in power of conception from that wonderful work, there are traces of a maturing mind in the softened medium through which the author contemplates her *dramatis personæ*. In her earlier work, excepting and not always excepting her pair of lovers, she has an impartial and amiable contempt for all, and laughs at every one of them with a soft cynicism which sees in the world chiefly an assemblage of delightfully absurd persons, who lay themselves out to ridicule, turn where you will and from every point of view. Even Darcy himself, though he imposes upon her by his grandeur and heroic qualities, is not always safe from her dart of keen and smiling derision, and nobody but Elizabeth, who occupies in the book something of her own position, escapes her amused perception of universal weakness. But by the time she reaches the length of *Emma*, those eyes full of insight have acquired a deeper view. Amusement is no longer the chief inspiration of her observant vision. She laughs still, but it is in another key. ✓ Mrs. Bennet was vulgar and heartless, despicable as well as ridiculous; but Miss Bates, though we laugh at her, excites none of the feelings of repulsion which move us for almost all Elizabeth Bennet's family, except Jane. The broken stream of talk, the jumbled ideas, and everlasting repetitions of the village busybody, touch us with an affectionate amusement. We are never so angry with Emma as when, in her irritation after one of her failures, she is unkind to Miss Bates. This good woman is managed with such skill and tenderness that she cannot be too diffuse and wandering, too confused and tedious, for the kindness we have for her. Her author laughs too, but softly, with a glimmer of moisture in those keen eyes which had no sympathy to spare for the Bennets; and in all Mr. Woodhouse's maunderings there is the same touch of humorous charity. They are

respectable to her in their weakness, as their predecessors were not. It is no longer saucy youth, remorseless, amused with everything, picking up every human creature about on the point of its dazzling spear for the ridicule of the world—but a sweeter, chastened faculty, not less capable of penetrating and divining, but finding something more to divine and penetrate than is dreamt of in the philosophy of twenty. With such a deepening and ripening of moral perception, what might we not have had if this wonderful observer of the human comedy had lived to the full extent of mortal life? But this is a vain question, and we may console ourselves with the belief that the supply of living energy in us is proportioned to the time we have to use it in.

*Persuasion* stands by itself among the busy chapters of common existence in which so many of the humours of life are exhibited to us, as a story with one sustained and serious interest of a graver kind. To be sure there are abundance of amusing characters and sketches, but Anne Elliot herself, pensive and overcast with the shadow of disappointment and wistful uncertainty, fixes our regard from beginning to end with a sentimental interest which is not to be found in any other of Miss Austen's works. Nothing can be further from a love-lorn damsel than the serious and charming young woman whose vicissitudes of feeling we follow with so much sympathy; but this is the only exclusively love-story in the series, far more distinctive as such than the duel between Darcy and Elizabeth, and intellectual trial of strength which ends in the mutual subjugation of these two favourite figures. Anne is introduced to us in her dignified and sweet seriousness, always very courageous and cheerful, and in full command of herself, but paled out of her first bloom, and with a little tremor of anticipation and wistful wonder whether all is over, continually about her in the very air. And to us

too is transferred that sense of suppressed anxiety and mute fear and hope. We follow her about always with our ears alive to every sound, amused in passing by the other people's eccentricities, but most occupied with her and with what is going to happen to her. Miss Austen is not a sentimentalist—love in her books takes no more than its proper place in life. Never from her lips would that artificial creed “’Tis woman’s whole existence” have come. One can fancy the glow of lambent laughter with which she would have demonstrated the foolishness of any such melodramatic dogma. But her little cycle of clearest life-philosophy would not have been complete had she not once given its full importance to this most momentous of human sentiments. Nobody knew better that Anne Elliot would have lived and made herself a worthy life anyhow, even if Captain Wentworth had not been faithful ; but there would have been a shadow upon that life—the sky would have been overcast, a cloud would have hung between her and the sun : and as step by step we get to see that her lover is faithful, the world cheers and lightens for us, and we recognise the divinity of happiness. It is the least amusing of Miss Austen’s books, but perhaps the most interesting, with its one *motif* distinct and fine, the thread that runs through all.

These works had no dazzling or instant success—but they made their way quietly into the esteem of the public. Oddly enough, of all people in the world, the Prince Regent admired these purest of domestic romances, and there is a semi-ludicrous episode narrated in Miss Austen’s biography concerning a certain secretary of the Prince, who showed her over Carlton House, and intimated to her that if she wished to dedicate her forthcoming book to his royal master, the permission to do so would be graciously accorded to her. Poor Miss Austen ! it was an embarrassing honour, and we may easily imagine that the last

patron she would have chosen was precisely this royal admirer. But there were others more worth such a woman's while, who gave her the tribute that was her due. "Read again, and for the third time at least, Miss Austen's very finely written novel of *Pride and Prejudice*," says Sir Walter, always generously open to every excellence. "That young lady had a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life, which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with. The Big Bow-wow strain I can do myself like any now going; but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment is denied to me. What a pity such a gifted creature died so early!"

She died in 1817 at the age of forty-two—a life long enough, but for the mysterious blank of ten years in it, to have accomplished much more. But what she has left us is perhaps more perfect workmanship in all than the work of any of her contemporaries. The change of manners is great since her day, though it is not so very far off. When we think of the comparatively small incomes with which she endows her rich men, and all that they seem able to do with their money, the difference makes us sigh: but in other points of view there are perhaps improvements to be recorded. Miss Austen, like every other writer of fiction, is fond of the picturesque position of a country clergyman, with which, indeed, she must have been thoroughly acquainted; but nowhere in High or Low or Broad Church could we find now-a-days the very secular persons who do duty in her pages under that character. That was the time when to obtrude religion upon your neighbours, or indeed any subject of the kind, save in the pulpit, was the worst of bad taste, and you were supposed to keep your views strictly to yourself on this matter though no other. And it cannot be said that

clerical or lay, there is much strain after the ideal in the minds of her various personages. They are generally very well satisfied with the good things that fall to their share, and do not waste their time in any foolish endeavours after the better. The deep vexation of Fanny Price over the vulgarity and shabbiness of her father's house, and her longing after the superior grace and beauty of Mansfield Park, where she was brought up as a dependant and very hardly treated, are almost servile, and give an unpleasant if very likely true impression of the way in which even a fine spirit may be beguiled by external advantages. Miss Austen herself thinks this very natural, and thoroughly justifies Fanny: but it is not an elevated point of view. Actual existence, however, as she sketches it, and all the amusing and delightful human creatures whom she introduces, in the warmth of natural life and humour, are more worth than the finest sentiments or the most skilful machinery: and in these points Miss Austen has no superior, and very few that can be called her peers.

The third representative woman fitly embodying her country by the side of the Irish and the English was Susan Ferrier, a little younger, and a much less voluminous writer: that is to say—for the epithet is as inapplicable to Miss Austen as to Miss Ferrier—where her English contemporary produced six books, she wrote but three, a trifle to Miss Edgeworth, who far exceeded both put together. Needless to say that in our own days none of these really great writers could be so much as named, if quantity were the chief distinction, beside a score of little names which have deluged their age. *Marriage* and *The Inheritance*, indeed, are almost the sole pillars of Miss Ferrier's fame, for her last work, though it has occasional gleams of fine humour, and the group in the chief's house is as good as the best of her productions, is not of great

quality as a whole. It is not generally supposed that mirth is characteristic of Scotland, but certainly there is more laughter to be got out of Miss Ferrier's three books than out of the voluminous series produced by Miss Edgeworth. It is on this ground that she is strong: her heroes and heroines are a little too excellent for flesh and blood, while her foolish and fashionable ladies, the butterflies of London society, whom she is fond of introducing to spread confusion and dismay into a primitive Highland society, are almost too foolish, artificial, and heartless for belief. But she has no sooner brought in one of these fine ladies into the house, be it the limited dwelling-place of a small laird, or the castle of a Highland chieftain, than her eye glows with fun, and all the absurdities of the position flash out before us in a light of genial humour, satirical yet kind. Lady Juliana has made a love-match in the most absolute and silliest ignorance of what she is doing, and her handsome soldier carries his bride to the tall gray house among the moors, which he has not himself seen since his childhood, and of which he thinks as a boy thinks of his home—and straightway there opens before us the homely unlovely house, full of fussy homely people, an old laird fresh from his fields, a host of anxious maiden aunts all eager to be of service—Miss Jacky, who is superior and sensible; Miss Nicky, who is the house-keeper; Miss Grizzy, the tender-hearted one, who is all kindness through and through. Their little formalisms, their alarm and surprise at the beautiful creature whom all their simple efforts cannot satisfy, their prejudices and simple conviction of the greatness of their castle and their race, all become visible in clearest vivid portraiture, each individual, but all in perfect harmony. Nobody, not Sir Walter himself, has given us a picture of the commonplace of Scottish gentry, the homely family life, the eccentricities of the old, and bashful rusticity of the young, to match

these curious revelations. Miss Ferrier wrote of what she knew. Miss Grizzy was as familiar a figure to her, evidently, as Miss Bates was to her English contemporary. And she does not spare us a detail of the shabbiness, the absence of everything beautiful, the bare and sordid aspect of life in homes out of which gallant soldiers were issuing every day, and in which, what we are accustomed to think of as the most desirable of all classes, the country gentry, were trained. The delicate satirist brings in her Lady Juliana to give the whole force of the picture by contrast. Not that the fashionable young lady, so terribly astray in such a house, is made to secure any of our sympathies, but her horror and astonishment throw a fuller light on the whole scene, and bring out all the grotesque features which familiar eyes apprehend dimly. Though we dislike the senseless little intruder, we cannot help seeing through her eyes, when she drops unprepared and incapable of understanding it, into this characteristic group. Her horror at the dreary house, rising gradually into hysterical dismay, as she reaches the prim, unused drawing-room, with its newly lighted fire, and meets the troop of grotesque women who rush to receive her with a babel of unfamiliar voices, strange accents, and language only half comprehensible, is required to bring out the humour of the scene, in which, however, the beautiful young heroine is much more odious than the perplexed and fussy old maidens, so anxious to be kind, and so bewildered by the reception given to their advances. This is a scene in which Miss Ferrier is even more trenchant than Miss Austen. She does not spare one eccentricity, or throw one ray of fictitious illumination upon the narrow minds and contracted unlovely living of the Scotch gentry whom she loved. In the house of the Bennets there were at least Elizabeth and Jane, with their pretty manners and cultivated minds to do credit to the family: but the Scottish novelist is



merciless. She makes no effort to harmonise her modern yet old-fashioned household with the tradition of Highland grace and breeding that ought to hang about an ancient race. Young and old alike are rustical, narrow, and coarse, if not in mind at least in externals. There is neither delicacy nor fine perception among them, nor any prettiness either of manner or person. The girls, indeed, are less interesting than their old aunts. Yet having done this with remorseless truth, it soon becomes apparent to us that there is a secret tenderness beneath, which is not in the touch, fine as a diamond-point, of the English writer. The Bennet ladies care nothing for any one, not even for each other, but Miss Jacky, Miss Nicky, and Miss Grizzy, with all their uncouthness, are overflowing with the milk of human kindness. Miss Grizzy, in particular, goes to the reader's heart. Perhaps it is because she is less wise than her sisters. Her bounty and liberality—with so little as she has to give!—are infinite. When she pays her famous visit to the charitable lady who is a collector of pebbles, her impulse to bestow the brooch which is Nicky's and not her own, and the alarmed struggle in her mind as to whether she has any right to be generous at Nicky's expense, and casuistical self-persuasion that Nicky would certainly do the same were she there—is such a sketch as only that mocking love which we call humour, could give. Miss Bates, who is a kind of English Miss Grizzy, had no leisure for any such self-discussion, neither would a similar impulse of generosity have occurred to her. She is perfectly honest and self-sufficing, but her custom is to receive and not to give; while the instinct of Highland generosity—the impulse of a ruling race—is strong in the ungainly bosom of the Scotch spinster. Miss Bates is far more tenderly drawn than the vulgar group of *Pride and Prejudice*, with its unredeemed pettiness and selfishness; but even that, how much below

in sympathy this picture, so heartfelt, so foolish, so uncouth, so tender and true! Miss Edgeworth has a kind of partisan kindness for her Irish peasants, of whom she is the advocate, holding a kindly brief, ready to explain away their imperfections; but Miss Ferrier loves her uncouth old heroine, and takes her to pieces with an affectionate and caressing hand.

The *bourgeois* group in the *Inheritance* is less attractive though not less amusing. Probably Miss Ferrier, in the instinctive prejudice of class, was more ready to see unmitigated vulgarity in the rich people who had sprung from a common stock than in the poor and uncultured gentry; but Uncle Adam, the cynical old bachelor, who lives the life of a retired shopkeeper in a little roadside villa of the meanest description, though he possesses a colossal fortune and a fine house close by, is again an instance of her tenderer skill; for though he talks like a peasant and lives like a retired cockney, there is the finest fund of poetry and romance in the old man's nature. He saves pennies in his little house, but he thinks the money dross when his niece wants it, and gives her a cheque for five hundred pounds as he would have given her a handful of gooseberries; and his adoration of the memory of the love of his youth is worthy of a poet. But it is Miss Pratt whom the reader will most readily associate with the name of the *Inheritance*—Miss Pratt, who is a larger and more confident Miss Bates, though without that lady's delightful incoherence, an endless commentator upon life, unmalicious and impartial, recording everything great and small, gathering up all the straws of social intercourse, and dauntlessly regardless of its prejudices. Here the author is as impartial as her creation, yielding to no sentiment, leaving us with the mere fact of this active, busy never-resting intelligence, ceaselessly occupied with other people's concerns, and shrewdly shooting at their motives

—with great success in the case of the less worthy personages of the drama, if with complete failure when the finer and more ideal natures come in her way. Miss Pratt's superiority to all the common weaknesses is as nobly displayed in her indifference to the stupid grandeur of the noble peer who tortures everybody else, but whose authority she sets at naught with bustling unconsciousness, as in her famous drive in the return hearse, which she takes advantage of in the failure of any other conveyance, with the true readiness of social genius. Nor does she stand upon her blood and breeding, when there is news to be picked up—and there is something to be picked up everywhere by so bold an observer. Whether she appears at the castle, sweeping away Lord Rossville with the torrent of her gossip, or amid the Blacks, finding out everything, universally affable and curious, there is no failure in her, she is perfectly sustained, yet quite natural from beginning to end.

Although the third of these novels is in itself less successful than its predecessors, there is perhaps nothing in either of them so perfect as the sketch of the chief's household in *Destiny* and its permanent members. Glenroy himself, the despotic, unreasoning, overbearing chief, trained to consider himself the greatest man in the district, and exacting a superstitious observance of all his will and ways; with his gentleman-in-waiting, Benbowie, the taciturn and self-contained, whose mute presence is as indispensable as that of a piece of furniture, but not much more remarkable; and the delightful, simple, beaming countenance of Mrs. Macauley, the humble cousin and housekeeper, whose perpetual good humour and satisfaction with all around her diffuse warmth throughout the picture—make a perfect group. Here we are on a very different level from that of the humble Castle of Glenfern. All the luxuries of the plains are under the noble roof, and along

with them that fading glory so infinitely pathetic in some aspects, so cruelly ridiculous in others, which is all that is left of an antiquated and outworn supremacy of race. The chieftain's unquestioning sense of his own greatness is like that of a monarch : while, like the faithful courtiers of an exiled king, the Highland gentleman and matron receive as something beyond question the commands, the hard words, the exacting requirements of their head. Some one has said that while Sir Walter depicted the last chapter of real power and greatness, the tragic and splendid ending of the reign of Highland chiefs and devotion of clans, it was Miss Ferrier's part to show the more melancholy downfall, the contempt of the modern world for what had become a mere romantic fiction, and breaking up of all reality in the obsolete position itself. There is some truth in the criticism as applied to *Destiny*. It is the reverse of that more dignified conclusion which made an end of the race of Vich Ian Vohr. The rest of the book is at once too good and too bad for nature. Never were such irreproachable instructive good people ; never such reckless, frivolous, despicable bad ones. The colours of the sentimental portion of the story are far too crude and unmodified. But Glenroy, Benbowie, and Mrs. Macauley are admirable. Here was an insight in which even Sir Walter himself yields the palm to the "sister shadow" of whom he spoke so kindly. His genius went back upon ages more picturesque. Miss Ferrier contented herself with what lay under her own eye. •

This gentle but powerful satirist was born in 1782, the daughter of a lawyer in Edinburgh. Her father, one of the caste of "Writers to the Signet," so largely recruited from among the poorer gentry of Scotland, and one of the most characteristic in Scotch society, was the agent of the Duke of Argyll, and spent much of his time at Inveraray, where his daughter no doubt saw among the English

visitors some types of her Lady Juliana, whom she never afterwards forgot. The details of her life, prefixed to Mr. Bentley's re-issue of her novels, afford us a little information with which the world was not acquainted. Her first efforts seem to have been inspired and encouraged by one of her companions in the noble household, Miss Clavering, a niece of the duke, in concert with whom, it was originally intended, her first book was to have been written; but this arrangement, fortunately, was soon thrown aside. It is said that the story of Mrs. Douglas in *Marriage* was from the pen of this young lady; if so, our gratitude for her withdrawal is all the deeper. It would seem by the letters now published that Miss Ferrier took advantage of the many original figures still existing in the society of the North as models for her pictures, and that a knowledge of the originals quickened the delight with which contemporaries received Miss Grizzy and Miss Jacky. When youth was over, she lived a perfectly retired life, in close attendance upon her aged father, devoting herself entirely to him; and it has been said that the seriousness of the religious views which she adopted in after life made her look with regret upon the novels of her youth as frivolous productions, unworthy her religious profession. This is, however, merely a tradition, and her appearance in the memoir of Sir Walter Scott, towards its melancholy close, is in no respect puritanical, but in every way sweet and satisfactory. She was admitted to his most private circle to help and support his daughters at the terrible moment when sickness had bowed down his noble soul and clouded his perfect temper. She was privileged to share with Anne and Sophia Scott the anxious hours of tendance, when, sick at heart to see the gathering gloom, they sat about him and heard him babble on through a hundred half-forgotten stories, painfully losing the thread of them and conscious that he had lost it. In these cases, Lock-

hart tells us, her kind help was of unspeakable consolation. "Unthinking friends sometimes gave him the catchword abruptly. I noticed the delicacy of Miss Ferrier on such occasions. Her sight was bad, and she took care not to use her glasses when he was speaking, and she affected also to be troubled with deafness, and would say: 'Well, I am getting as dull as a post; I have not heard a word since you said so and so,' being sure to mention a circumstance behind that at which he had really halted. He then took up the thread with his habitual smile of courtesy, as if forgetting his case entirely in the consideration of the lady's infirmity." He had given to her first work the warmest meed of cordial praise, as was his wont, and had cultivated her friendship always. She repaid him now in tender helpfulness, with such gentle good offices; and this is almost all that there is to tell of Susan Ferrier. The distinguished philosopher Professor Ferrier of St. Andrews, still so tenderly remembered by all who knew him, was her nephew: an interesting fact for those who believe in the oblique communication, rather than direct descent, of literary genius.

There have been more brilliant novelists, more potent writers, than these three ladies. None of them come up to the level of George Sand or George Eliot, in sentiment or philosophy; but they were of more importance in their generation than either George Eliot or George Sand, and laid open the workings of the common life as no one else had done in the three countries which they represent so well. In this point of view Miss Edgeworth, though the least attractive, is perhaps the most important of the three, as being the first to make known what manner of country Ireland was. But the others, if less vital in point of matter, were more vivid and living in their power of portraiture and representation of life, not in its extraordinary accidents, but in the most common phases

of every day. Miss Austen, who confined herself entirely to these, seeking no foreign aid of highly wrought story or dramatic incident, was the most perfect artist of the three, and has kept her place beyond all competitors. Yet there are points in which Miss Ferrier is almost superior to Miss Austen, having a touch more tender and a deeper poetic insight. There is no more interesting group in all the literary combinations of their age. There was, however, no genial link between them, no tie of association. It would not seem that they even knew each other. Jane Austen was lost in the mediocrity of that featureless English life in which the good people, with a proper pride, hold themselves aloof from all the doubtful classes. Her biographer is proud to repeat that she had no literary connections or acquaintances. A Marchioness of Something invited her on one occasion to meet some distinguished persons of that craft; but Miss Austen firmly declined the honour, which was at the same time a derogation, and held fast to the dignity, far superior to personal distinction, of that nameless gentlewomanhood in which is the quintessence of pride. The others were not so exclusive. Miss Edgeworth had a great name in her day, and was received with honour and admiration everywhere; and Miss Ferrier was famed, at least in Edinburgh—no insignificant distinction. Both of these latter names are connected with the genial glory of Scott, who gave them his friendship and generous applause. He could not do what they did, he says, with the pleasure of an entirely noble and simple mind, delighting in excellence wherever he found it.

We have already pointed out how curiously *arriéré* and of an earlier age was the *Simple Story* of Mrs. Inchbald, though it was a popular and much read book, and actually produced at the same time with Miss Austen's earliest and perhaps greatest work: the one all of the old

world, conventional, artificial, with a pretty air, if not of the Dresden shepherdess, at least of the imitations of Chelsea and Bow; the other real, living, of this day and all time, notwithstanding the old-fashioned dress of its heroes and heroines. They were contemporaries, yet the antiquated art of the eighteenth century made its bow, or rather its curtsy, with Miss Milner; and the new reign of fiction came in, in individual womanhood, with Elizabeth Bennet. Miss Edgeworth had no predecessor in her special mission, but, so far as one phase of her work went, followed in the traces of an eccentric educationalist, and formed the transition link between those quaint little gentlemen, Sandford and Merton, Master Tommy the spoilt child, and Harry the son of the soil, and the all-instructive Mr. Barlow—and the nineteenth century schoolboy, who has played so large a place in the world since then. Miss Ferrier, too, had a predecessor, though she produced little, whose essay in fiction is in a somewhat similar vein. *The Cottagers of Glenburnie*, published in 1808 by Elizabeth Hamilton, is full of insight into Scottish character, and humorous treatment of its characteristic shortcomings; but it is perhaps too distinctly a story written with a purpose, and that a very homely one, to take a high place in art.

MARIA EDGEWORTH, born 1767; died 1849.

Published Castle Rackrent, 1801.

Ennui.

Vivian.

The Absentee.

Belinda.

Leonora.

Patronage.

Harrington.

Ormond.



Published *Helen*.

With many lesser tales, collected as *Moral Tales*, *Tales of Fashionable Life*, etc. A collected edition was published in 1832, and again in 1848.

*Rosamond*, 1822.

*Henry and Lucy*.

*The Parent's Assistant*.

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JANE AUSTEN, born 1775 ; died 1817.

Published *Sense and Sensibility*, 1811.

*Pride and Prejudice*, 1813.

*Mansfield Park*, 1814.

*Emma*, 1816.

*Northanger Abbey*,  
*Persuasion*, } 1818.

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SUSAN FERRIER, born 1782 ; died 1854.

Published *Marriage*, 1818.

*The Inheritance*, 1824.

*Destiny*. 1831.

## CHAPTER VII.

## LITERATURE IN IRELAND.

THERE is unfortunately but little necessity to apportion a separate chapter to the literature of Ireland. We have already remarked upon the singular absence of literary production, and of genius at all worthy to be called national, which we find at a period so rich in literary power, in the unfortunate island, which, to the great misfortune both of her neighbours and herself, is so closely connected with Great Britain. What a happy solution would it be of many problems could engineering science, which has done so much, find means to move that uneasy Erin out into the wide Atlantic, far enough off from us to give her full scope for independence and self-development ! They move houses and churches in America, why not an island ? Such a divorce would be hailed, we should imagine, with delight on both sides—and would afford a full opportunity for the putting forth of national effort, up to this time sadly wasted in internal agitations, and affording us no means of estimating the national genius. Great social unhappiness and political restraint do not, however, seem to furnish a sufficient reason for the absence of worthy utterance, especially in a race so generally pervaded by the lighter gifts, at least, of wit and fancy ; and we can scarcely accept the Catholic disabilities and the wrongs of Ireland as enough to account

for her silence in the world. No country could be more bound in chains of iron, in political repression and corruption, than was Scotland in the end of last century. It is true that there was no dominant race holding the mastery, and that in religion the people had their own way; but they had no political power, nor freedom of self-government, and the nation was under the heel of an almost irresponsible minister, and an entirely dominant party. Yet Burns rose out of the homely fields when political freedom had no existence—and the vivacious army of the Critics at an after period burst forth from the very prison-house and coldest shade of social oppression. In Ireland a few songs and speeches, a little fiction, but even that not of the highest order, is all that we find to distinguish an age which, in both the other countries of the Union, was nothing less than a new birth. Miss Edgeworth and Thomas Moore, both of whom have already been individually treated, are the only names which we can pick out to take their place in the lists of those which are really of national importance; and the latter we feel can only be admitted on sufferance to any such classification. He is a poor creature to stand against Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley—or even against Burns and Scott, who represent the smaller of the partners in the Union; but, such as he is, he is the best that Ireland has done.

It is true that Sheridan, then just waning, had been in his day one of the most brilliant figures in society, and in the lighter sphere of literary composition; but in a national point of view there was no meaning in him, any more than there was any promise of a new literary era in the fine comedies which are his only real standing ground in literature, and which belonged entirely, in spirit and scenery and sentiment, to the eighteenth century. It is scarcely possible indeed, even though Sheridan's bril-

liant wit and disorderly ways were a sort of impersonation of the conventional character of the Irishman, to record him as Irish at all, save by birth. He was educated at Harrow, and was nominally a member of one of the Inns of Court. The society, of which he was so remarkable a figure, was in London, not Dublin. His romance of early love was enacted in Bath. His great triumphs as an orator were in the British Parliament, and not even upon subjects in any way connected with Ireland. The younger but much less important orator and playwright, Richard Lalor Sheil, was a better representative of his country. But his plays are of little or no importance, and he was absorbed in his mature days by parliamentary life, in which he never made so brilliant a figure as Sheridan. This, indeed, is the sphere in which the Irishmen have showed best, and it is a pity that we cannot find justification enough in his political pamphlets to take in the grandiose, if never entirely grand, figure of Daniel O'Connell, the great Liberator, the leader of his people, one of the best and most satisfactory embodiments of his race. The very limited niche which is all we could give him in literary history would afford no fit pedestal for a personage so important in the history of his country. Who can doubt that he had his faults? That shade of unreality which belongs to a character so expansive, so eager for popular approbation, born to please as well as born to sway, and the inextinguishable twinkle in the eye of a man who was never quite unconscious of his own art—the “blarney” supposed to be native to his race, the too-persuasive eloquence, the touch of humbug in his utmost sincerity—sadly detract from his greatness. But when all is said that can be said, there are few manly critics or generous lookers-on who would not compound for still more imperfections could Ireland and we have back the Liberator with all his native bigness and large and genial

life. The contrast between O'Connell, born under circumstances which would have indeed excused any degree of national rancour and bitterness, yet so full, even in hottest fight, of the happy humour, the instinctive friendliness, and easy sentiment, which were once supposed habitual to his race, and the bitter theorists and revolutionaries produced by a later generation and in an age entirely awakened to, and eagerly trying to remedy, everything like injustice to Ireland, is extraordinary. Surely, in the meantime, that happy humour and engaging eloquence, the wit, the fancy, the diffusion of a kind of genial genius over the face of the country, which we once cordially believed in, as characteristic of Ireland, must have died away. Perhaps, indeed, O'Connell, among his other influences, possessed the power of making us take for granted the fine faculties of his countrymen, and thus was not only the glory but the glorifier of his race.

To descend, however, from this great representative of the nation, who stands, like one of her unique towers, in the midst of her, with no fit competitor near him, and whom, unfortunately, we have little pretence for introducing, we are obliged to descend into the ordinary strain of literature, making a great step downward from Sheridan to his namesake James Sheridan Knowles, a playwright of considerable pretensions and some skill, though little genius, whose plays had an enormous popularity, some of them still, in a certain degree, holding the stage. The tragedy of *Virginius* and the picturesque *Hunchback* are still among those which managers occasionally resort to, to give a prick of new sensation to jaded playgoers. There was some link of relationship, whence the name, between the more famous Sheridan and Knowles, who, however, was of a humbler strain of life—the son of a schoolmaster, and for some time exercising the same profession. “Knowles is a delightful fellow, and a man of true

genius," Wilson says of him in the *Noctes*, in respect to a series of lectures upon Dramatic Poetry which he delivered in various places both in England and Scotland. His life underwent a curious change in his later years, when the successful dramatist turned his back upon his art, such as it was, abjured the wickedness of the theatre, and began with all the violence natural to an Irish Protestant, trained in the keen polemics which close neighbourhood to any hostile system invariably cultivates, to assault Popery and the Church of Rome. He ended his life as a Baptist Minister, bitterly regretting, it is said, the time and labour which he had bestowed on the stage and the world.

A very fair and gentle representative of poetry, Mary Tighe, the daughter of a clergyman, the wife of an Irish M.P., is another of the rare instances of literary production in Ireland. She was the author of a poem called *Psyche*, an extremely sweet and melodious rendering of the classical legend, the external form of which, in a slim and sumptuous quarto, with creamy pages as thick as velvet enshrining in big margins a limpid stream of elaborate verse, gives a very just idea of its merit. It is one of those essays in art which at any time it would be cruel to judge rigorously, all the more as it is the composition of a gentle creature who died young and knew nothing of the world—which, with a humane sense of the claims of weakness, generally does receive such gentle efforts tenderly. This lady lived during all her short life in Ireland, an invalid for a great part of it, sometimes receiving the gay and brilliant Sydney Owenson, the *Wild Irish Girl*, in her sick-chamber, but not capable of much society, if indeed there had been any of the literary kind to resort to. But we find little that is worthy the name in the lively Dublin world, which we see in Lady Morgan's recollections, where she herself stood almost alone as the representative of the lighter arts of literature. The common

reproach to Scotsmen that the first step of their progress is always to leave their native country, which was ludicrously untrue in the age we have been discussing, however much it may have been justified before or after, was strongly in force in Ireland, whence every aspiring soul in the ways of literature, except Miss Edgeworth, fled with the utmost speed, Moore giving the first example, to the centre of fame in London. The records we have of society in Dublin are few. Moore and Lady Morgan show us little but a jovial provincialism illustrated by sundry little local reputations never heard of elsewhere, while the curious and incoherent work in which Mr. Madden gives us the history of Irish Periodical literature presents little more than a chaotic record of dead quarrels, libels, and vituperations, as violent as it is uninformative. Before the Union Dublin booksellers pirated English publications as Americans do now. Perhaps this crime against literature has something to do with the stunting of the race in literary development.

The name of Maturin has almost died altogether from the recollection of the reader, and it is with difficulty that the student can find any of the many works which he poured forth, and which, indeed, are little worth the trouble of looking for. His high-flown productions and romantic theatrical figure might, however, have thrown at least an amusing tragi-comic light upon his surroundings had any record of them been attainable. He was a clergyman of the Established Church, and lived in Dublin, "the humble unknown curate of St. Peter's," until the great good fortune happened to him of having his tragedy of *Bertram; or, The Castle of St. Aldobrand* produced at Drury Lane; where, by the influence of Lord Byron, it was played in the year 1816, bringing him a great deal of momentary reputation, and a substantial profit of a thousand pounds—five hundred of

which is popularly said to have come from Lord Byron to console the unfortunate dramatist for a fierce review. But this does not seem a very likely story, for neither then, nor at any other period, were Byron's pounds so plentiful as to have permitted such a munificence; though he says himself that he sent applause "and something more substantial" to the Irish poet. *Bertram* is a play of the most wildly Satanic character, dealing with crimes of primitive magnitude, with terrific storms and equally terrific bloodshed, to appal the terrified reader. It is difficult to imagine how it could have been put upon the stage at all. The author's intention was to introduce the highest diabolical agency. "He had our old friend Satan," says Sir Walter (by whom he was introduced to Byron), "brought on the stage bodily. I believe I have exorcised the foul fiend—for though in reading he was a most terrible fellow, I feared for his reception in public." At the same time, Scott, with his usual kindness, describes the play as possessing merits which are "marked, deep, and striking," though he confesses that its faults are "of a nature obnoxious to ridicule." Byron, however, and the public approved this preposterous tragedy: and Coleridge did it the extraordinary honour of devoting a whole chapter in the *Biographia Literaria* to its slaughter and dissection. The next drama of Maturin made, however, an end of his fictitious reputation. Byron describes it as "as heavy a nightmare as was ever bestrode by indigestion," "Maturin's Bedlam," and other equally uncomplimentary titles. One of the stage directions he quotes is as follows: "Staggers among the bodies;" and it is not a bad indication of the style of the whole.

After, and indeed before, these dramatic performances, Maturin wrote many novels. He had begun at a very early age with *The Fatal Revenge; or, The Family of*



*Montorio*, a work bearing some relation to the *Monk* of Lewis, one of a numerous school of tragical romances such as used to be found in the old circulating libraries now an institution of the past, and which had a certain reputation. This was followed in after years by a number of others, of which *Melmoth* is perhaps the best known. He was at the same time a popular preacher, and collected, we are told, crowds to hear him, "neither rain nor storm" keeping his admirers back. Personally he was "something of a coxcomb," with long flowing black hair, and a poet's eyes full of fine frenzy. A somewhat ludicrous description of his habits is given in Scott's Life. "Hartstonge told us that Maturin used to compose with a wafer pasted on his forehead, which was the signal that if any of his family entered the *sanctum*, they must not speak to him;" a curious tale to be told to Scott, whom everybody interrupted. "He was never bred in a writer's *chaumer*," said the great novelist. But Scott was very kind to the theatrical Irishman, and sent him money and good advice and help of every kind.

There was, however, one other poet in the island whose reputation is of a nobler and more lasting kind: Charles Wolfe, who has made an impression not easily to be effaced, upon the memory of the world, by one poem, the famous and affecting *Lines on the Burial of Sir John Moore*, which rank among the most remarkable instances on record of real poetical life, in distinction from the hundred fictitious and ephemeral lives which flutter and die, and leave no trace behind. How many volumes, nay libraries, have dropped easily into oblivion, while these half dozen stanzas have lived and lasted! No finer or more picturesque piece of verse exists in our record. It is just so much rhetorical as to give us a pleasant sense of being able to identify the region from whence it springs—with a thrill of personal emotion in

it, as if of an individual voice, proud yet sad in tuneful exultation, which sounds like a national accent: and yet even here the nationality is doubtful. Wolfe was nothing more than a young curate of the Irish Church, by his very position pronounced to be no Irishman, but one of the dominating Saxons who have no right to national honours at all. And it is most curious to see how entirely it is this class, and not the native race, which we are all ready to acknowledge as so full of genius, which has produced the little there is to distinguish Ireland in literature. Miss Edgeworth, too, belonged to it, and had no claim to be a Celt. Wolfe discharged his humble duties, such as they were, we are told, with devotion, and died at thirty, having done no more. It would seem that he had received only one inspiration, but that a noble and a true one.

The same, so far as nationality is concerned, must be said of George Croly, another nominal Irishman, who was educated at Trinity College, Dublin, and naturally goes to the credit of that country, though he too belonged to the Anglo-Irish Church, and spent the most important part of his life as a clergyman in London. His works are numberless; from sermons to novels, from political pamphlets to romantic poems. The book by which he is best known is the singular romance of *Salathiel*, embodying one of the legends of the Wandering Jew, and showing occasionally considerable power. This book made a distinct impression upon the mind of the time, and holds a fantastic place, if not on the same level as *Vathek*, at least in a similar fanciful region; but it has not, like *Vathek*, kept the reputation which in its day it obtained.

A better-known and more characteristic figure is that of William Maginn, one of the most brilliant of the band of magazine writers to whom *Blackwood* first afforded a medium—younger than the great critics of the reviews,

more dashing but less serious, who in one way never reached the level of Jeffrey, but in another surpassed and excelled him." Maginn was born in Cork, and was a schoolmaster there for some part of his early existence. At twenty-six he began to contribute to *Blackwood's Magazine*, which had then (1819) been for about two years in existence, and was in full tide of that reckless youth which permitted itself every literary liberty, and to which, indeed—notwithstanding the fires of resentment it lit everywhere, to the anguish of the victims and amusement of the public—almost every liberty was allowed. Maginn was, if anything, less scrupulous than the original coterie of Edinburgh, the compilers of the *Chaldee Manuscript*: and he had not only an excellent style, but an easy and powerful command of classical subjects, than which nothing is more effective and telling in periodical literature. A bit of brilliant translation, an adaptation from Homer, a scrap of Horace, lightly turned into contemporary use, is everything to the light gallop of a slashing article, and confers on the writer a position which the world immediately appreciates, and the less learned envy. Everybody will remember Captain Shandon, in *Pendennis*, peppering his sentences with learned extracts from old Burton. Maginn, unfortunately, had many features like those of Shandon, and like him lived a distracted life from luxury to misery, through prisons and disreputable hidings, and every vicissitude that poverty and levity and bad habits and an unstable mind produce. He was still young and full of hope, "with genius, wit, learning, life's trophies to win," as Lockhart says of him, when he went to London in 1823—abandoning any security of anchorage that he might have had at home. But his career in town was not prosperous. He was employed on various papers, and in 1830 became one of the chief writers in *Fraser's Magazine*, which then came into being, and which

moulded itself perhaps too much on the model of the already famous and firmly established *Blackwood*, of which it was the first rival. Maginn attempted in this new undertaking the part which Christopher North played in the old ; but, great as was the popularity of the *Noctes*, a second effort of the same kind was a literary mistake, and the attempt showed an absence of originating power, and was probably a cause of permanent damage to the new magazine, which ought, in order to secure the success of its predecessor, to have struck a new vein. And the brilliant Irishman had not the continuance in him of Wilson. He spent himself like a fortune, and died before he was fifty, poor, suffering, and solitary. Sir Robert Peel, the one Minister of State in recent times whose heart was always open to the distresses of men of letters, and to whom it seemed a duty of the State to care for her servants in this department, was appealed to on behalf of Maginn ; but too late. Lockhart's epitaph, with its jingle upon one rhyme, has a levity in it which, though probably very harmonious with the relations between them, and with the poor author's reckless and haphazard ways, must, we should think, have jarred even upon the ear of a man about town when given forth over a grave ; but the description is worth quoting:—

- “ He turned author ere yet there was beard on his chin ;  
And whoever was out, or whoever was in,  
For you Tories his fine Irish brains he would spin—  
Who received prose and rhyme with a promising grin—  
• ‘ Go ahead, you queer fish, and more power to your fin !’  
But to save from starvation stirred never a pin. •  
Light for long was his heart, though his breeches were thin ;  
But at last he was beat—”

Poor Maginn ! It was his own fault, as it has been the fault of so many, that their lives are squandered and their faculties lost ; but that does not make the loss less pitiful, rather more.

Francis Mahony—or, as he called himself, O'Mahony, better known as Father Prout—was a kindred spirit, with the same mixture of fun, learning, and fluency which distinguished Maginn. The fact that he was a priest, with something of an academical aspect even at his wildest, lent a certain piquancy to the strange Bohemian with his fine and delicate countenance, and the touch of sentiment which mellowed his mirth. He is called by somebody “an Irish potato seasoned with Attic salt,” and the comparison has a certain appropriateness. He, too, was one of that roving band of literary irregulars, hanging on about the Press, generally finding their highest latitude in a monthly magazine, with always some scrap of literature in hand, but more enjoyment of the floating atmosphere of literary life than of the work—of whom there were so many, differing greatly from the earlier development of the Cockney school and the *bourgeois* group of writers whom we have already endeavoured to put before the reader, and indeed overlapping altogether the boundaries of time to which we have been obliged to keep. But there are so few Irishmen to whom we can give a place in this record, that chronology yields to the desire to make the best we can of our subject. Neither Father Prout, however, nor Sir Morgan O'Doherty, which was the little literary disguise under which Maginn presented himself to the world, were of a character or kind to do much honour to their native country; nor was their work illustrative of its character, or apt, like Scott's, to make it known to the world. They wrote upon all other subjects with the wit of their nation and the ready command of words which belong to the race; but they did not illustrate or open up the life of Ireland, or aim at any patriotic end. They were English writers of Irish birth, and that was all. We may quote, however, one snatch of characteristic verse, which has something in it of the

visionary home-sickness and tender longing of an exile. To have heard Mahony sing this, an old man, leaning his fine old head, like a carving in ivory, against the mantel-shelf, in a cracked and thready voice which had once been fine, is a pathetic memory. Between the melodious commonplace of Moore's melodies and the wild and impassioned ravings of the Shan Van Voght, this more temperate type of Irish verse, with its characteristic broken melody, its touch of mockery, its soul of tender if not profound remembrance, is wholesome and grateful, though it has no pretension to be great :—

#### THE SHANDON BELLS.

" With deep affection  
And recollection  
I often think on  
                    Those Shandon bells ;  
Whose sounds so wild would,  
In the days of childhood,  
Fling round my cradle  
                    Their magic spells.  
On thee I ponder  
Where'er I wander,  
And thus grow fonder,  
                    Sweet Cork, of thee ;  
With thy bells of Shandon  
That sound so grand on  
The pleasant waters  
                    Of the river Lee.

" I've heard bells tolling  
Old Adrian's Mole in,  
Their thunder rolling  
                    From the Vatican.  
And cymbals glorious  
Swinging uproarious  
In the gorgeous turrets  
                    Of Notre Dame ;

But thy sounds were sweeter  
 Than the dome of Peter  
 Flings on the Tiber,  
                     Pealing solemnly  
 Oh the bells of Shandon  
 Sound far more grand on  
 The pleasant waters  
                     Of the river Lee !

“ There’s a bell in Moscow ;  
 While on tower and kiosk, O,  
 In Saint Sophia,  
                     The Turkman gets ;  
 And loud in air  
 Calls ever to prayer,  
 From the tapering summit  
                     Of tall minarets.  
 Such empty phantom  
 I freely grant ’em ;  
 But there is an anthem  
                     More dear to me—  
 ’Tis the bells of Shandon  
 That sound so grand on  
 The pleasant waters  
                     Of the river Lee.”

Lady Morgan has a right to an honourable place among this small band of Irish writers. She was born Sydney Owenson, the daughter of a popular actor, and her youthful life was passed among scenes characteristically Irish, the ups and downs of the theatre—a life made up of perpetual variations between luxury and penury, and that shifty life of expedients which quickens the wits, and out of which perhaps its victims, whose sufferings we lament so much, get a degree of excitement, pleasurable as well as painful, which makes them much less miserable than we imagine. When she grew up and it became necessary for her to provide for herself, the lively and brilliant girl took up at first, as a helpless woman has to do, the life of a governess, in which she continued with

varying fortunes, until she discovered that she possessed a gift by which a living was much more easily made. *The Wild Irish Girl* was, in its way, a surprise and revelation to the world, not the less amusing in that there was a good deal of absurdity mingled with its gushing sentiment and melodramatic situations: and that the authoress was not disinclined to pose as Glorvina, and to receive the homage of society as the original of that child of nature. After some years of a literary career, successful enough yet never without drawbacks, she became attached, vaguely, as companion or friend, to the household of the Marquis of Abercorn, among several other genteel dependants, one of whom was Dr. Morgan, who had the charge of the health of the house. The glimpse we have in her letters and biography of the queer little court there, surrounding the great people, is curious and not very pleasant. Her patrons made up a match between their two *protégés*—not without difficulty, for though the doctor fell in love heartily, the lady-in-waiting was fanciful and fastidious, and had to be brought to the point at last almost by stratagem. The bridegroom was turned into Sir Charles by the intervention of the Lord-Lieutenant, and Lady Morgan acquired a title and was launched into the world, very thankful to be free of her patrons, and to regain her independence. After a temporary residence in Dublin the pair settled in London, where Lady Morgan enjoyed and sought society, and got through a good deal of literary production. She wrote a book upon France and another on Italy, the result of journeys through both countries. Lord Byron praised the latter performance, and declared it to be true and just. But other critics were not so kind. The *Quarterly*, in particular, made her an object of attack in a way which was beneath the dignity of a great periodical, describing her style, with some truth but much uncalled-for virulence, as “slipshod



Irish." A writer of Lady Morgan's calibre might count it promotion indeed, to be taken so much notice of by a great organ of opinion now. It might have been expected that the autobiography and letters of a lively observer, however flippant and egotistical, would have thrown some light upon the Irish life of the period and society in Dublin. But we do not find, so far as Lady Morgan can tell us, that even so much of literary society as one of the coteries of the English country towns, of which we have encountered so many, existed in the Irish capital.

There is, however, a delightful and cordial sketch of this capital in the account of Sir Walter Scott's visit to Dublin in 1825, which gives us a much higher opinion of its capabilities. The distinguished persons who crowded to see him were not distinguished in literature: but the genial enthusiasm of the people for the great Scotsman is pleasant to hear of. The "demonstrations of respect which awaited him wherever he moved at the hands of the less elevated orders of the Dublin population," astonished the party. "If his carriage was recognised at the door of any public establishment, the street was sure to be crowded before he came out again," says Lockhart. "When he entered a street, the word was passed down both sides like lightning, and the shopkeepers and their wives stood bowing and curtsying all the way down; while the mob and boys huzzaced as at the chariot wheels of a conqueror." So great was the emotion that an excellent bailie of Glasgow, something akin no doubt to Nicol'Jarvie, shook his head and declared that "*yon* was ower like worshipping the creature," as he looked on.

There was, at this same period, in existence a learned colony in Trinity College, which has worked more laboriously and diligently than almost any contemporary scholars at the work of collecting and editing the ancient records of Irish history, and thus made very important

contributions to the knowledge of the world. But these labours are performed with a disinterestedness of which, in spite of ourselves, we take advantage ; for it is not for the unlearned to attempt to estimate the value of these researches, and the names of their workers in this rich and important field, though thoroughly well known and honoured in their own sphere, are almost unknown to the general public.

When the first quarter of the century, to which we have confined our record, was just over, a younger band of novelists had begun to appear on Irish soil. The names of John Banim, Gerald Griffin, William Carleton, and Thomas Crofton Croker cannot, any of them, be placed in the first rank—but their works were more national, more worthy of being considered as elucidations of the life of their country and the character of their race than those of any previous writers, with the exception of Miss Edgeworth. There is a sort of arbitrary connection between the repeal of the Catholic disabilities and the appearance of this little outburst of literary energy ; but we feel very doubtful whether we should be justified in attempting to establish any reasonable link of association between the two. Gerald Griffin is perhaps the most noticeable of this band. He began in extreme youth, like so many others of his countrymen, by dramatic writing, and when he went to England to try his fortune like the rest, an unknown and unbefriended youth of twenty, in 1823—placed his hopes upon the tragedy of *Gisippus* which he carried with him, and which he fondly hoped was to open to him at once the glories and rewards of a literary career. But his play was rejected on all hands ; and when at length it fell into those of Macready and attained a great name on the stage, the author had already passed beyond all knowledge of his triumph. The struggle of the unfortunate youth without friends or means

in London was a very hard and bitter one; but he lived through it, and his novels, especially *The Collegians*, established his reputation. This book is perhaps now more widely known by the popular play of the Colleen Bawn, which was founded upon it, than by its own attractions. But the story is the least satisfactory part of it, and the sketches of life and character to be met with in the book are infinitely more worth the reader's while than the melodramatic fate of Eily O'Connor, and the despair and misery of her lover. Not even Miss Edgeworth's account of the successive squires of *Castle Rackrent* sets forth the wild groups of Irish gentry with so trenchant a touch as that with which Griffin represents his Oregans and Creaghs in their noisy carouses: and his peasants of all descriptions are full of humour and life—more individual and displaying a more intimate knowledge than those of Miss Edgeworth. Whether it is that the country has grown duller and ruder since then we are unable to judge, but certainly the atmosphere in these novels is of a more genial kind than anything we hear of now. The country folks simple and gay, with their characteristic songs, their friendly greetings, their light hearts and ready wit, though not without the gloom of a tragedy here and there, and as ready to lend their lively faculties to the work of baffling justice as to any other exercise, are certainly devoid of the bitterness and sense of injury which seem so universal now. We naturally look in a work written before the repeal of the Catholic disabilities for some deep rankling of injured feeling, but the reader will find no trace of it in *The Collegians*. Griffin was a pious Catholic, and ended his life in a religious brotherhood; his sympathies were entirely with his race: but the picture he puts before us bears little trace either of a persecuted faith or an oppressed nationality. The tragic elements of his story are drawn, as they might have been in a tale of the

Scottish Highlands, from the exaggerated and unscrupulous devotion of a faithful servant to what in his warped and gloomy mind he thinks the interests of his master ; and while we have a fine example of the astute and triumphant policy of a couple of the rudest peasants in baffling the united powers of magistrate and counsellors, it is in behalf of no political criminal, nor is any feud between landlord and tenant so much as hinted at. A good deal of this is no doubt due to the mind and tendencies of the writer and his pure and gentle genius—but something too must belong to the atmosphere of the time. We have already spoken of the great and wonderful difference between the Arch-Agitator O'Connell, he who was in reality the nursling of wrong, brought up under the shadow of a galling Protestant ascendancy, and with every excuse for national rancour, and the bitter politicians of the present day. The novelist affords us a kindred example. He shows us no gloom upon the skies, no burning at the heart of his country. As we walk with him along the mountain paths every one we meet has a cheerful greeting, a genial jest, a song upon his lips—the country is gay, brighter than our fat English levels, the long-winded peasant-stories are full of a humorous contemplation both of earth and heaven. It is hard to realise that the easy lightheartedness which we meet with everywhere is the atmosphere of a country which not very long before had been rent by armed rebellion, and still more recently convulsed by a political struggle in which every element of national bitterness might have been expected to manifest itself. We have few materials for determining what is the poet's, the romancer's account of the country now—but if the daily records be trustworthy the picture would be a very different one in our own day. The following scene, though somewhat long for quotation, affords so bright a panorama of the country as Griffin saw

it, and is so little known, that we may venture to insert it here. The story which is being told by Lowry, and in which a delightfully Irish ghost does his best to make the fortune of the clever Dan who is its hero, goes on for several pages, and is too lengthy for insertion:—

“At this moment a number of smart young fellows, dressed out in new felt hats, clean shoes and stockings, with ribbons flying at the knees, passed them on the road. They touched their hats respectfully to Mr. Daly, while they recognised his attendant with a nod, a smile, and a familiar ‘Is that the way, Lowry?’

“‘The very way, then, lads,’ said Lowry, casting a longing look after them. ‘Goin’ to Garryowen they are now, divartin’ for the night,’ he added in a half envious tone, after which he threw the skirt of his coat from the left to the right arm, looked down at his feet, struck the ground with the end of his stick, and trotted on, singing—

“‘I’m noted for dancin’ a jig in good order,  
A min’et I’d march, an’ I’d foot a good reel;  
In a country dance I’d still be the leading partner,  
I ne’er faultered yet from a crack on the heel.

“‘My heart is wil ye, boys, this night. But I was tellin’ you, Master Kyrle, about Dan Dawley’s luck! Listen, hether.’

“He dried his face, which was glistening with moisture, and flushed with exercise, in his frieze coat, and commenced his story.

“‘Tis not in Castle Chute the family lived always, sir, only in ould Mr. Chute’s time, he built it, an’ left the Fort above, an’ I’ll tell you for what raison. The ould man of all, that had the Fort before him, used to be showing himself there at night, himself an’ his wife, an’ his two daughters, an’ a son, an’ there were the strangest noises ever you hear, going on above stairs. The master had six or seven sarvints, one after another, stopping up to watch him, but there isn’t one of ’em but was killed by the spirit. Well, he was forced to quit at last on the ’count of it, an’ it is then he built Castle Chute—the new part of it, where Miss Anne an’ the ould lady lives now. Well an’ good, if he did, he was standin’ one mornin’ oppozit his own gate on the road side, out, an’ the sun shining, an’ the birds singing for themselves in the bushes, when who should he see only Dan Dawley, an’ he a little gaffer the same time, serenadin’ down the road for the bare life. “Where to now, lad?” says Mr. Chute (he was a mighty pleasant man). “Looking for a master, then,” says Dan Dawley. “Why, then, never go past this gate for him,”

says Mr. Chute, "if you'll do what I bid you," says he. "What's that, sir?" says the boy. So he up an' told him the whole story about the Fort, an' how somethin' used to be showin' itself there, constant, in the dead hour o' the night; "an' have you the courage," says he, "to sit up a night, an' watch it?" "What would I get by it?" says Dan, looking him up in the face. "I'll give you twenty guineas in the mornin', an' a table, an' a chair, an' a pint o' whisky, an' a fire, an' a candle, an' your dinner before you go," says Mr. Chute. "Never say it again," says the gorsoon, "'tis high wages for one night's work, an' I never yet done," says he, "anything that would make me in dread o' the living or the dead, or afraid to trust myself into the hands o' the Almighty." "Very well, away with you," says the gentleman, "an' I'll have your life if you tell me a word of a lie in the mornin'," says he. "I will not, sir," says the boy, "for what?" Well, he went there, an' he drew the table a-near the fire for himself, an' got his candle, an' began readin' his book. 'Tis the loneliest place you ever seen. Well, that was well an' good, till he heard the greatest racket that ever was going on above stairs, as if all the slates on the roof were fallin'. "I'm in dread," says Dan, "that these people will do me some bad hurt," says he, an' hardly he said the word, when the doore opened, and in they all walked, the ould gentleman with a great big wig on him, an' the wife, an' the two daughters, an' the son. Well, they all put elbows upon themselves, an' stood lookin' at him out in the middle o' the floore. He said nothin' an' they said nothin', an' at last, when they were tired o' lookin' they went out an' walked the whole house, an' went up stairs again. The gentleman came in the mornin' early. "Good morrow, good boy," says he. "Good morrow, sir!" says the boy. "I had a dale o' fine company here, last night," says he, "ladies an' gentlemen." "It's a lie you're tellin' me," says Mr. Chute. "'Tis not a word of a lie, sir," says Dan; "there was an ould gentleman with a big wig, an' an ould lady, an' two young ones, an' a young gentleman," says he. "True for you," says Mr. Chute, puttin' a hand in his pocket, and reachin' him *twenty* guineas. "Will you stay there another night?" says he. "I will, sir," says Dan. Well, he went walkin' about the fields for himself, and when night comes——'

"You may pass over the adventures of the second night, Lowry," said Kyrle, 'for I suspect that nothing was effected until the third.'

"Why, then, you just guessed it, sir. Well, the third night he said to himself, "Escape how I can," says he, "I'll speak to that ould man with the wig, that does be puttin' an elbow on himself an' lookin' at me!" Well, the ould man an' all of 'em came an' stood opposit him with elbows on 'em as before. Dan got frightened,

seeing 'em stop so long in the one place, an' the ould man lookin' so wicked (he was after killin' six or seven, in the same Fort), an' he went down on his two knees, an' he put his hands together, an', says he——'

At this point the animated but long-winded story breaks off, and the novelist presents us with another sketch of rural life, which is as bright as it is simple—full of local colour and natural truth—

"A familiar incident of Irish pastoral life occasioned an interruption in this part of the legend. Two blooming country girls, their hair confined with a simple black ribbon, their cotton gowns pinned up in front, so as to disclose the greater portion of the blue stuff petticoat underneath, and their countenances bright with health and laughter, ran out from a cottage door, and intercepted the progress of the travellers. The prettier of the two skipped across the road, holding between her fingers a worsted thread, while the other retained between her hands the large ball from which it had been unwound. Kyrle paused, too well acquainted with the country customs to break through the slender impediment.

"*'Pay your footing, now, Master Kyrle Daly, before you go farther,'* said one.

"*'Don't overlook the wheel, sir,'* added the girl who remained next the door.

"*'Kyrle searched his pocket for a shilling, while Lowry, with a half-smiling, half-censuring face, murmured—*

*'Why, then, heaven send ye sense, as it is it ye want this mornin'.'*

"*'And you manners, Mr. Looby. Single your freedom, and double your distance, I beg o' you. Sure your purse, if you have one, is safe in your pocket. Long life an' a good wife to you, Master Kyrle, an' I wisht I had a better hould than this o' you. I wisht you were in looze, an' that I had the finding of you this mornin'.'*

"*'So saying, while she smiled merrily on Kyrle, and darting a scornful glance at Lowry Looby, she returned to her woollen wheel, singing, as she twirled it round—*

*'I want no lectures from a learned master,*

*He may bestow 'em on his silly train—*

*I'd sooner walk through my blooming garden,*

*An' hear the whistle of my jolly swain.'*

“To which Lowry, who received the lines, as they were probably intended, in a satirical sense, replied, as he trotted forwards, in the same strain—

“‘Those dressy an’ smooth-faced young maidens,  
Who now looks at present so gay,  
Has borrowed some words o’ good English,  
An’ knows not one half what they say.  
No female is fit to be married,  
Nor fancied by no man at all,  
But those who can sport a drab mantle,  
An’ likewise a cassimere shawl.’”

“‘Boop-whisk! Why, then, she’s a clean made little girl for all, isn’t she, Master Kyrle? But I was tellin’ you—where’s this I was?’”

We should have liked to add the powerful and dreadful scene in which the dying musings of the poor huntsman Dalton are interrupted by the drunken shouts and laughter of a riotous party in the dining-room, from which there comes a message to the poor sufferer “to give them one fox-hunting screech before you go.” The last shout in which his life goes, in the midst of the tumultuous chorus of the half-drunk gentlemen, and the heartless jests and laughter with which they hear that all is over, furnish a stern picture of a life far less attractive and sympathetic than that of the homelier peasant-folk. We add one of the songs which are scattered through the book, and which is full of the sweet tunefulness of the Irish melodies, with a vein of far higher feeling, and the purest natural sentiment:—

“*Gillia ma chree,*  
Sit down by me.  
We now are joined, and ne’er shall sever  
This hearth’s our own,  
Our hearts are one,  
And peace is ours for ever!  
When I was poor,  
Your father’s door  
Was closed against your constant lover.



"With care and pain,  
 I tried in vain  
 My fortunes to recover.  
 I said, 'To other lands I'll roam,  
 Where fate may smile on me, love !'  
 I said, 'Farewell, my own old home !'  
 And I said, 'Farewell to thee, love !'  
 Sing *Gilli ma chree*, etc.

"I might have said,  
 'My mountain maid,  
 Come live with me, your own true lover ;  
 I know a spot,  
 A silent cot,  
 Your friends can ne'er discover.  
 Where gently flows the waveless tide,  
 By one small garden only ;  
 Where the heron waves his wings so wide,  
 And the linnet sings so lonely.'  
 Sing *Gilli ma chree*, etc.

"I might have said,  
 'My mountain maid,  
 A father's right was never given  
 True hearts to curse,  
 With tyrant force,  
 That have been blessed in heaven.'  
 But, then, I said, 'In after years,  
 When thoughts of home shall find her,  
 My love may mourn, with secret tears,  
 Her friends thus left behind her.'  
 Sing *Gilli ma chree*, etc.

"'Oh no,' I said,  
 'My own dear maid,  
 For me, though all forlorn, for ever,  
 That heart of thine  
 Shall ne'er repine  
 O'er slighted duty—never !  
 From home and thee though wandering far  
 A dreary fate be mine, love ;  
 I'd rather live in endless war  
 Than buy my peace with thine, love.'  
 Sing *Gilli ma chree*, etc.

“Far, far away,  
By night and day,  
I toiled to win a golden treasure  
And golden gains  
Repaid my pains  
In fair and shining measure.  
I sought again my native land ;  
Thy father welcomed me, love ;  
I poured my gold into his hand,  
And my guerdon found in thee, love.  
Sing *Gilli ma chree*,  
Sit down by me,  
We now are joined, and ne’er shall sever ;  
This hearth’s our own,  
Our hearts are one,  
And peace is ours for ever.”

Griffin died in 1840, in the exercise of his humble duties as a member of the Christian Brotherhood at Cork. His publications were all a little after the period within which we have confined ourselves. Banim, his friend and contemporary, began his work about the same period. Carleton was still farther on in time. We give these names, and the above record of the most remarkable among them, by way of making up in some degree the vacancy in which Ireland unfortunately stands at this period. T. C. Grattan, another name of the period, was also a novelist of respectable reputation : but his scenes were not laid in Ireland, nor can he be called a national writer.

We may add that the one only, and not perhaps very dignified, public acknowledgment which the professors of literature ever receive in England was bestowed in a manner which we may call lavish on most of the members of this Irish school of fiction. Lady Morgan, Banim, and Carleton were all recipients of pensions on the Civil List, so that any advantage to be derived from that national compliment was fully accorded to the country, which nevertheless has in this way contributed so little to the common stock. •

JAMES SHERIDAN KNOWLES, born 1784 ; died 1862.

Virginius was his first play, produced in England at Covent Garden, 1820.

Dramatic Works, collected 1843.

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MARY TICHE, born 1773 ; died 1810.

Published *Psyche*, 1805.

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CHARLES ROBERT MATURIN, born 1782 ; died 1824.

Published *The Fatal Revenge ; or, The Family of Montorio*, 1804.

*The Wild Irish Boy*, 1808.

*The Milesian Chief*, 1811.

*Bertram ; or, The Castle of Aldobrand*, 1816.

*Manuel*, 1817.

*Women ; or, Pour et Contra*, 1818.

*Sermons*, 1819.

*Fredocyno*—a tragedy, 1819.

*Melmoth the Wanderer*—a novel, 1820.

*The Universe*—a poem, 1821.

*Six Sermons on Popery*, 1824.

*The Albigenses*—a romance, 1824.

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CHARLES WOLFE, born 1791 ; died 1823.

Poetical Remains, 1825.

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WILLIAM MAGINN, born 1794 ; died 1842.

Contributions to *Blackwood's Magazine*, beginning 1818.

„ *Fraser's Magazine* „ 1830.

And many other contributions to periodical literature.

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FRANCIS MAHONY, born 1805 ; died 1865.

Published *Facts and Figures from Italy*.

*Reliques of Father Prout*, 1836.

Many contributions to *Fraser* and other magazines and newspapers

LADY MORGAN, born 1783 ; died 1859.

Published *St. Clair*, 1804.

*Novice of St. Dominick*, 1805.

*Wild Irish Girl*, 1806.

*Patriotic Sketches in Ireland*, 1807.

*The Lay of an Irish Harp and Irish Melodies*, 1807.

*Ida of Athens*, 1809.

*The Missionary, an Indian Tale*, 1811.

*O'Donell*, 1812.

*Florence MacCarthy*, 1816.

*France* (in conjunction with her husband), 1817.

*Italy*, 1821.

*Life of Salvator Rosa*, 1823.

*Absenteeism*, 1825.

*The O'Briens and O'Flahertys*, 1827.

*Woman and Her Master*, 1840.

With several lesser works.

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GERALD GRIFFIN, born 1803 ; died 1840.

Published *Holland-tide ; or, Munster Popular Tales*, 1828.

*The Collegians*, 1828.

And several other works and tales at later dates.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE HISTORIANS AND PHILOSOPHERS : HENRY HALLAM, JOSEPH LINGARD—JEREMY BENTHAM, JAMES MACKINTOSH, JAMES MILL.

HISTORY and Philosophy have always had a certain alliance. It is little possible to investigate the problems of one science without some tendency towards the solutions of the other. The great and many-coloured panorama of existence, with all those vicissitudes that seem so capricious, those successions that are so inevitable, leading the mind from generation to generation in order to catch a thread of meaning or answer a question, has but little effect upon the spectator if it does not lead him to seek some acquaintance with the constitution of human nature, the origin from which all its laws and its irregularities come. The great historians of the past have in most cases recognised the affinity of the two subjects, and the advantage of securing a larger and more comprehensive view of facts and events, by due recognition of their moral and intellectual relations. In the age which we have been discussing it is difficult to know under which heading to classify some of the most important names, since no one will deny to Hallam the title of a philosophical historian; and of Mackintosh and Mill, it is difficult to say which sphere claims them most. We will place in this record the more formal students of history first, without taking

from the others who were historians as well as philosophers their just importance in this lofty field.

The art of history is one which, like all other arts, has greatly changed in its conditions in modern times. On the face of things it would seem that the nearer a historian was to the events which he records, the more accurate and complete his information was likely to be ; but it requires little thought to perceive how much that is temporary and evanescent is involved in every contemporary narrative, and how many deluding lights of individual opinion and general gossip flash about the scene, from which it is the province of the historian to choose those points of real illumination which may be reckoned on. Were the means of judging for ourselves in this very department of literature which has occupied us through these volumes taken from us, and our minds left at the mercy of the critics and historians of the period, what a curiously changed aspect would the history of literature in the beginning of the nineteenth century bear ! The monarchs of the age would be dethroned to give place to petty satraps, of whom now-a-days we scarcely know the names ; and even if the injustice perpetrated were less in degree, the most curious confusion of levels would remain to mar the conclusions of posterity. As it is, we are nothing but witnesses transmitting each our share of evidence to be judged by those who come after, in whose hands a continually accumulating mass of testimony is being collected. It is impossible to doubt that this has its evils too, and that the existence of the partisan-historian, he who proves his points at his will by a careful selection of so much of the evidence as suits him, is the creation of that all-examining, anxiously-weighing modern science which receives every witness with doubt, cross-examines and throws cold water upon him, and to which the easy conclusions of the past are old-fashioned and contemptible.

The close and persistent search to which we are now accustomed in all sorts of dusty archives and out-of-the-way corners was scarcely thought of in the easy days of Hume, when genius and insight were believed in more than dusty papers, letters, reports, and account-books, such as now tell so largely in history. The comfortable independence of his methods has ceased to be possible. German historians, with their gift of elaboration and the enormous patience which is so strong a characteristic of their minds and work, have made a revolution in the science. The result in England has not been that of producing impartiality ; but it has enlarged and enriched our records with many individual studies, more graphic, perhaps, than a more colourless medium could have supplied. In no time could the least genial critic venture to assert that English historians have either falsified or withheld evidence, or consciously given themselves to the attempt to make the worse appear the better cause. But a man may carry out his own tendencies in his work, and prove to himself the superior excellence of his own opinions from all the lessons of the past, without infringing truth or doing intentional injustice. Even without any subservience to opinion, impartiality and a perfectly even-handed justice are impaired on all hands by individual incapacities. Nature will have her word in the most severely balanced of minds, and even the finest intelligence finds points here and there on which all the teachings of the age are powerless to enlighten it. Thus the calm and judicial Hallam, the most important historian of this period, speaks of Francis of Assisi, one of the most interesting and touching figures of the old world, as "a harmless enthusiast scarcely of sane mind," all unconscious how much he impoverishes history and narrows the sphere of human interest by this failure to comprehend one side, and that a most striking one, of life and action. This is

not so much want of impartiality as want of perception—a natural disability. Thus to the best some portion of the records of time must always remain obscure. We are not sure whether the cause of historical truth is not better served by those who set forth honestly the claims of their own side, without intentional injustice to the other, but also without any attempt to disguise the way in which their own sympathies go—than by those who laboriously endeavour to hold the balance with a steadiness which does not belong to mortal nerves. The tendency has perhaps increased in our own times to an undesirable extent; and Macaulay's Whiggery, and Froude's antagonism to everything ecclesiastical, are in some cases almost rabid. But when Sir James Mackintosh led the way to the glorification of Revolution principles, the political tendency was rather for good than evil; and nobody grudges to the Roman Catholics now-a-days that they have a historian so honourable, so conscientious, and generally accurate as Lingard, to say the best that can be said for them. Amid the multitude of voices on the other side of the question, the individuality of the champion who though conscientiously anxious nothing to extenuate, nor set down aught in malice, has yet his eyes open to every good, and his mind to every explanation, on one side of the question, is sometimes a positive advantage.

Mitford's *History of Greece*, which, beginning in 1784, continued to be published during our period, scarcely belongs to it, being a work of the former school of historical writing, and superseded altogether by more recent studies. It was the first history of Greece in English, and a scholarly and gentlemanly performance altogether, though without those lights of more exact science and deeper research which have since become available. The same may be said of other classical histories of less importance. Such books as these, when superseded by



better information, fall naturally into the catalogue of "*books which are no books*," in which Lamb profanely includes the works of Hume and Gibbon. It is probable that this whimsical philosopher would have added to his list the large and important productions of Hallam, as well as those of his predecessors, as belonging to the class of works which are read for profit rather than for pleasure. And in so far as their adaptation to be treated in a popular history of literature goes, Lamb's humorous classification is not without justice. What is to be said about a great historian like Hallam by a modest writer claiming no authority on his imperial themes? Criticism of the style which has admirably served its purpose would be inappropriate, and criticism of his subjects would involve the reader in a disquisition upon the greater part of the history of the modern world. It is another matter with the poets, the essayists, and the writers of fiction more familiar to our bosoms than those great teachers, who sit like the sages above our comments, throned in the calm of an authoritative chair, the judges of a tribunal at which the nations themselves come to be judged. Few in our country have attained this place so completely as Hallam. Gibbon's strong antichristian bias, his attacks, both insidious and direct, upon the religion of Christendom have made him vulnerable, and opened the way to his assailants; but at the same time, his brilliancy and energy of style give him an immediate influence upon his readers which the measured calm and self-controlled sobriety of Hallam do not possess. It is scarcely possible that a Constitutional History should be entertaining reading. It is, in Lamb's sense, no reading at all, but work demanding all the faculties, and the most complete strain of attention. The picturesque is rejected altogether by this severe art, and all the lesser devices with which writers of a lighter strain think no shame to attract the attention of their

readers, are entirely banished. But the value of the works in question is rather enhanced than lessened by this studied absence of the graces. Their learning, their judgment, their importance as standards of opinion, their solidity as a foundation of future researches, is all the more indisputable that no glamour is ever thrown into the eyes of the reader, and no supreme sympathy with the historian's view ever allowed to bias his judgment. There is little in these works to tempt the roving eye of the devourer of literature who reads for simple pleasure, but their style is such as to put no obstacles in the way of those who read for information and improvement. It is throughout good, clear, and lucid, with an occasional rise into something like eloquence. It is, however, very difficult to discuss in detail works of such a kind; and we cannot do better than to adopt the principle which Mr. Hallam himself sets forth as his own guide in a similar case.

"Some departments of literature," he writes in the Preface to his *Literary History*, "are passed over, or partially touched. Among the former are books relating to particular arts, as agriculture or painting; or to subjects of merely local interest, as those of English law. Among the latter is the great and extensive portion of every library, the historical. Unless when history has been written with peculiar beauty of language or philosophical spirit, I have generally omitted all mention of it. In our researches after truth of fact, the number of books that possess some value is exceedingly great, and would occupy a disproportionate space in such a general view of literature as the present."

Hallam was the son of a dignitary of the Church, the Dean of Bristol, and he lived all his life in the atmosphere of letters and classical lore. His first step in literature was made in the *Edinburgh Review*, a few years after its first appearance; but his politics were not of that complexion, though this literary tie, and his friendship with many eminent members of the Liberal party, gave a false

impression on this point, and laid him open to the assaults of the *Quarterly Review*, the natural enemy not only of its rival the *Edinburgh*, but of everything that could be supposed to belong to the opposite party, according to the fashion of the time. Miss Martineau, in one of the brilliant little sketches of her contemporaries which she contributed to the newspapers of the day, affords us some information as to the personal aspect of the great historian, in which we can more fully trust to her, than in her discriminations of character and purpose.

"The reader of his weighty (not heavy) works," she says, "impressed with the judicial character of the style both of thought and expression, imagined him a solemn pale student, and might almost expect to see him in a judge's wig; whereas the stranger would find in him the most rapid talker in the company, quick in his movements, genial in his feelings, earnest in narrative, rather full of dissent from what everybody said, innocently surprised when he found himself agreeing with anybody, and pretty sure to blurt out something before the day was done, but never giving offence, because his talk was always the fresh growth of the topic, and, it may be added, his manners were those of a thorough-bred gentleman."

"Hallam with his mouth full of cabbage and contradiction," Sydney Smith said of him when describing a dinner party. This lively, talkative, argumentative person does not fit at all into the serious image presented to us in the histories, so grave, so careful, so full of large reading and sober judgment. The same authority tells us, as an instance of the manner in which literature leavened all his thoughts, that the political enthusiasm about Spain which rose in England at the time of the heroic resistance made by that country to Napoleon, turned the mind of the historian to the study of Spanish literature, the natural result in his mind of a new interest.

The incidents which have given interest to Hallam's life have, however, little to do with books or learning, and belong to the closest of domestic sentiments. He had a son in

whom all that a father's wishes could desire seemed embodied—a young man whom all his contemporaries unite in describing as of the highest promise, and who, indeed, is spoken of with a not unnatural inflation and exaggeration of style by those who loved him, as of one who had scarcely his equal among men. It was ill-advised, we think, and shows how uncritical love can be, that Arthur Hallam's remains should ever have been exposed to the judgment of critics less enthusiastic: for there is little in them to justify the lofty estimate of his powers formed by all his friends. But, at all events, his fate has been a rare one. Not long after this young man had completed, amid universal plaudits and approbation, his academical career, and when he was entering upon life in all the hope of highly-cultured youth, sharing all his father's tastes and pleasures, and affording him that satisfaction in his child, grown a man and a dearest friend, in addition to the natural tie, which is of all human pleasures perhaps the most perfect—he went abroad with his father upon a journey of pleasure. “At a German town he was slightly unwell with a cold, and Mr. Hallam went out alone for his afternoon walk, leaving Arthur on the sofa. Finding him asleep on his return, he took a book and read for an hour; and then he became impressed by the extreme stillness of the sleeper. The sleeper was cold, and must have been dead almost from the moment when he had last spoken.” This was the calamity which produced the wonderful poem of *In Memoriam*. It places the great historian, the calm and profound scholar, the man whose lofty impersonal work was one of the glories of the time, in the very heart of pity and tender sympathy: for that must be a cold heart indeed which can hear of such a catastrophe unmoved. A similar affliction occurred twice again in the melancholy yet steadfast and courageous life of the great writer. His wife and his eldest daughter

both died in the same way. His second son, about the same age, was also taken from him. His calm life of letters, undisturbed by any pangs of poverty or agitations of ordinary trouble, full of wealth and prosperity and success, was thus made into a continual tragedy. Many men have held their own in the face of vexing anxieties and disappointments of all kinds, unable to get any satisfaction for their soul out of a hard and bitter existence. But this man had everything that life could bestow, easy success, and all the graces and sweetnesss of life—yet death with them, taking all he loved from him, a strange and terrible example of the vanity of human things. He went on courageously with his life and his work in spite of all.

The *History of the Middle Ages* and the *Constitutional History of England* were produced in the early part of his life. The former is perhaps his greatest work, and it is impossible not to admire the large and noble investigation of universal life into which the writer enters, perceiving in every change of living its after development, and tracing from step to step the bursting of successive husks, the opening out of new channels, the gradual rise and growth of the forces with which we are now familiar in their far distant origin, so much unlike, yet so closely connected with the present issues—and at the same time the dyings-off, the failures, the unproductive attempts of the past. The *Constitutional History* was the natural successor of the earlier work carrying out the narrative of the development of law and government in England from the prefatory sketch which is to be found in the eighth chapter of the *Middle Ages*. No one will seek in these volumes for the picturesque scenes, the breathless excitement of the latest fashion in history, that which, according to Macaulay's prophecy, would be "more in request at all the libraries than the last novel;" but the reader will find

in them something more consonant with the old ideal of historic teaching, the guidance of the closest investigation, the lights of boundless research, the decisions of a calm and steady judgment. The *History of Literature in the 15th, 16th, and 17th Centuries* was the occupation of a later period, of the much-tried and tragic years of which we have already told the melancholy story. Perhaps the idea of so huge a piece of work came to his mind as a kind of consolation amid all the surging returns of grief; but it would be vain to claim for this elaborate book the same rank or importance as belong to his other productions. These remain as standards of national instruction. They were of course subjected to the usual amount of criticism at the time of their publication: were considered on one side dangerous, as "dealing with deductions rather than details," and on the other as "strikingly practical;" by Southey as "the production of a decided partisan;" by Macaulay as distinguished by a "calm, steady impartiality." But now that contemporary voices are silenced, they remain standards of historical knowledge indispensable to all students, and setting forth the growth and development of the English constitution and laws on one hand, and of the gradual emergence of modern systems of law and government out of the ruins of the old world on the other: as has been done by no other hand.

And whatever critics might say of him in that brief contemporary scuffle through which every new work has to win its way to fame, the verdict of the world in Hallam's case was never doubtful. His books are not for the careless reader: but their authority and weight are undoubted, and all that honour and high appreciation could do was his, to make his existence more possible for him. And notwithstanding his many bereavements, and the quenching out for him of all the happier Lights of life, he lived to be an old man, and never abandoned society

and its delights. There is a passage in his criticism upon Milton, which throws a touching light upon the chief consolation of his lonely life. He has been reminding the reader that all the classic suggestions, and even imitations to be found in Milton's poems, must have come from recollection.

"Then the remembrance of early reading came on his dark and lonely path like the moon emerging from the clouds. Then it was that the Muse was truly his—not only as she poured her native inspiration into his mind, but as the daughter of Memory coming with fragments of ancient melodies, the voice of Euripides and Homer and Tasso, sounds that he had loved in youth, and treasured up for the solace of his age. They who, though not enduring the penalty of Milton, have known what it is—when afar from books, in solitude, or in travelling, or in the intervals of worldly care—to feed upon poetical recollections, to murmur over the beautiful lines whose cadence has long delighted their ear, to recall the sentiments and images which retain, by association, the charms that early years once gave them, they will feel the inestimable value of committing to memory, in the prime of its power, what it easily receives and indelibly retains. I know not, indeed, whether an education that deals much with poetry, such as is still usual in England, has any more solid argument among many in its favour, than that it lays the foundation of intellectual pleasures at the other extreme of life."

When we read this we can scarcely fail to think of the old man, alone in those long yet so swiftly passing years, that compose the end of life, largely surrounded by friends, and distractions, and all the lively coming and going of society, in which he himself was as lively and busy a figure as any—yet like every old man when strength began to fail him, and all that were his very own had gone from him, inevitably alone for many a lingering hour. A natural sympathy identifies the writer himself with his subject, and we cannot but feel that he too, withdrawn by age and bereavement into some such hermitage as that which his blindness made to Milton, must have consoled himself in his solitude with "the beautiful lines

whose cadence had long delighted his ears," walking softly back as through long silent libraries, through his studies and collections of the past. The thought has in it a fine and dignified repose, a melancholy quiet, which indeed cannot but be sad, but which is better and more seemly than much that is supposed to be happiness.

We are brought back to the recollection of what we have called, without any disrespectful meaning, the Partisan-Historians, by the next name we encounter, that of the Catholic writer whose heart, no doubt, had burned within him to see the calmness of assumption with which Protestant England—then in one of her most Protestant moods—satisfied herself as to the atrocious tendencies of Popery, its monopoly of persecution and bloodshed; and though she became rabid with terror at the very name, yet plumed herself on the scornful certainty that the Roman Catholic Church was a thing of the past. It is strange, indeed, that the members of such an ever-living and dauntless priesthood, with organisations so powerful and servants so devoted, should have let the other side so long have their way undisturbed. The subdued forces and patient waiting of the entire Catholic community for so long a stretch of time, its consent to be vanquished, and endurance of suffering and scorn, is a very remarkable feature of these times, and shows the stunning effect of its final downfall and disappointment, when the day of the Stuarts came to an end, more emphatically than anything else could do: as well as the never-dying hope and certainty of eventual triumph which has always been its inspiration. It is accordingly with a sense of pleasure that we hear the first voice rise from this humiliated community, humiliated in England almost beyond example. How it was possible that they could have endured so long all the Tests and insulting disabilities under which they lay, and that, at least in England, so little of the



bitterness of a grievance should have showed itself in their minds, is very remarkable in the records of religious endurance. John Lingard was one of the Catholic priests of the old school, trained at Douay in all the lore and traditions of a class which is universally acknowledged to have been more refined and cultivated, more liberal and less polemical, than that with which we have more recently made acquaintance. When the troubles of the Revolution arose in France, and the college was broken up, Lingard came back, with most of its members, to England. In these days there was little hope in Rome of any reconquest of this country to the old faith; and however Catholic disabilities might rankle in the bosoms of those who had to sacrifice their rights as citizens to their faith, there had not as yet begun to arise among them either the indignation which prompts to action, or the hope of doing any good by it. It is curious, indeed, to find so little evidence anywhere, either in England or Ireland, of the bitterness which political and social disabilities ought, it would seem, to have produced. It was, as we have said, a time when Protestantism was rampant in England. There was no High Church party; or if it existed in tradition, its habits were fox-hunting, and its religion, according to Scotch nomenclature, "moderate." All that was living and active was evangelical; so-called Ritual was at the lowest ebb; Popery a feeble and hopeless piece of antiquity. And when the learned and laborious priest in his Lancashire village began upon his history of England, nothing could have appeared more unlikely to any spectator or critic than that there should come a time when a large section of the Church of England herself should be pleased to contemplate history from the same point of view. Lingard held the humble position of what was in reality a dissenting minister, in the village of Hornby, far away from the great world, humbly paid

and lodged, though there would be, no doubt, among his congregation some great personage or other attached to the Catholic faith to give him a link of connection with the greater world. Here he remained all his life, unmoved by the honours which were, if he chose, within his reach, and here died, having resisted all efforts to raise his rank or magnify his position. It is said, even, that the Pope offered a cardinal's hat to the humble rural priest who was doing a work so important to the Church; but this wonderful honour, never, probably, before offered directly to a person so humble, did not tempt him. He is said to have returned the excellent answer and excuse for his refusal, that "it would quite put a stop to the progress of my history." The Papal See has seldom been so observant of humble merit.

His first work was upon the *Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, and was received with a violent and alarmed No-Popery article from the pen of Southey in the *Quarterly*, though with some faint praises from other quarters. The *History of England* was published when the author had reached the full maturity of life after years of preparation and laborious research. How far that research extended to original documents was doubted at the time, and it would be impossible to attempt to decide the question now; but the work, on the whole, outlived all the assaults made upon it, and has always been treated respectfully in the world of letters. At a time when the easier and more graphic style of literary composition had scarcely been allowed to force its way into the solemn methods of the historic muse, Lingard used a natural and graceful diction, which is still readable after Froude and Macaulay. He was one of the first adventurers in the new epoch, pricking over the plain on his own account, instead of marching square and solid like a battalion with the force of a Hume or a Gibbon

undisturbed by other competitors in the field. Though he lived out of the world, he was no mere bookworm; but when he was assailed, could defend himself with all the vigour of a practised fighter. The *Edinburgh Review*, in the person of Allen, the medical adviser and prime minister of Holland House, fell upon him with all its ponderous force; but the poor priest, out of his little parsonage, held his own gallantly, neither crying out, like so many victims, nor flinching from the shock of arms. Not to touch upon the most difficult crisis of all, the age of Henry VIII. and Elizabeth, it would be vain to say, that his treatment, for instance, of such a figure as that of Wycliffe is generous or even fair. The reader cannot fail to see that all the consequences, so unforeseen, of Wycliffe's early protest against the corruptions of the Church have got into the eyes of the historian and given a grudge to all he says. But if he imputes to the Reformer a certain dissimulation in the explanation of his own words, he attributes to him no unworthy motive, nor any political object beyond those which his champions would gladly allow—the furtherance of liberty, the abolition of local bondage, and the relief of the commonalty from taxes beyond their power of paying. The manner of the treatment is ungracious—the historian disliking the hero: but not so much as Gibbon disliked Christianity, to take an example prior to the Roman Catholic historian, or as Mr. Froude disliked Mary Stuart, to take a later instance. The student will take these partialities for what they are worth; the common reader, in all likelihood, will be little affected by them. It is a necessity of all judicial processes to hear both sides of the question, and the preponderance of testimony was so much on the other side that this honest and dignified partisan is of advantage to the decision.

And it makes an agreeable addition to the literary

records of the time to see this obscure priest, with his little flock about him, saying his mass in his village chapel : retiring among his books, interrupted, perhaps, in the middle of a chapter to carry salvation to some sickbed : putting away the cardinal's hat, with perhaps a touch of fine impatience, as an interruption to "the progress of my history:" and, after his long life, dying as he had lived, among the same village community, the director of their simple souls, before anybody had dreamed that a hierarchy could be re-established, and Cardinal Archbishops flourish again in England. There is no telling whether, perhaps, the village priest's Catholic history may not have had some share in bringing that new development about.

The works of Dr. Thomas M'Crie may claim a place on a similar line with those of Lingard—higher, in so far that his impartiality is less severely tested ; not so high in national importance, since the general mind never condemned Knox and the Scotch Reformers as it had condemned the Roman Catholic champions. But it must not be forgotten that the tendency of history and opinion had been to the Royal side in Scotland, and that where Mary Stuart was the favourite heroine, John Knox was scarcely like to have his full rights as the great patriot and wise statesman he proved himself to be. And no more deadly wound could have been aimed at the national prejudices and prepossessions than Sir Walter, the pride of Scotsmen, had aimed at the heroes of the Covenant. We may flatter ourselves that it was easier to show the noble love of freedom and dauntless spirit of these rustic martyrs than to vindicate Mary Tudor and her supporters ; but at least there was in it a kindred inspiration, though so different an aim.

We require to go a long way back into the old century

to pick up the philosopher whose works and thoughts made a new beginning and a separate theory in mental and political science, as distinctly as Wordsworth made a new beginning in poetry. Jeremy Bentham was twenty-two, and had just made the first step in his career by the publication of his *Fragment on Government*, when Wordsworth, the eldest of all the poetic race, was born; but he lasted out the first quarter of this century in eccentric vigour, and his system is as much identified with the age we have been discussing as the poetry itself, which distinguishes it among all ages. Bentham, like every originator, has something in him of that absence of natural lineage which distinguished the old priestly patriarch on the Chaldean plains. He is "without father and without mother" in his rank as a philosopher. His system, according to his own account of it, seems to have sprung from his perception of the necessity of a link of general principle to bring together the subjects and studies which interested him most. It is the custom of philosophy in the present day to ignore all possibility of that creation of something out of nothing which once was thought the prerogative of genius, and to trace every new line of speculation, every new development of thought, every inspiration even of poetry, to influence and training. This idea had not been thought of in Bentham's time; and though he was not of an imaginative mind or apt to reject the agency of secondary means, yet his claims as an inventor are as distinct as if it had been a piece of machinery he had put together, and not a scheme of philosophy. His dormant intelligence was fired by a suggestion found in one of Priestley's letters, he tells us; but his system was not Priestley's, nor developed out of anything that came from that sectarian thinker. The contact between the two minds was momentary; the touch was like that of fire to tinder, or, rather like the

firing of the train by an accidental spark ; and all that followed arose from the application of an original mind to difficulties, which many, no doubt, had felt without attempting to solve them before. Bentham's system has had the greatest influence upon the world since his time. It is sufficiently important to be considered a new departure in the world of thought ; and, as such, it has received the allegiance of as devoted a band of disciples as ever surrounded any master in science or morals. The prophet was one of the oddest that ever moved humanity, a strange little being full of quips and cranks : in mind a sort of thinking machine, working up every kind of harsh material, and rolling out schemes, codes, and legislative suggestions by the mile, with an inexhaustible fertility ; in habits a recluse, though surrounded by an endless flow of society, and incapable of existing, it would seem, without a little court of dependants and admirers ; in all studies but his own destitute of so much as the capacity to understand—like one of those abnormal beings, the sport of science in the present day, of whom accident or misadventure has annulled one side of the brain, and who are incapable of exercising any but one set of faculties. It is true that our impression of him is chiefly derived from the descriptions of his old age, with its shrill gaiety and eldritch affectionateness, his laugh, which is something between a cricket's chirp and the cackinnation of a pantaloon ; his babble of superannuated fondness for the naughty or good boys (according as they pleased ~~him~~), who bore names so provocative of kindness and fondling as those of Henry Brougham and Daniel O'Connell, both of whom were supposed to sit on the knee, and to be fed with pap by the spoon of the cackling old patriarch. It is difficult, with the picture of this chuckling and chirping grandfather in his chair, amid all the oddities of his philosophical workshop, with his band

of adulators about him, all distinguished by titles of jocular abuse or drivelling fondness, and all, so far as appears, responding with never a snarl to his requirements, to remember that Jeremy Bentham was not always an old man, and that the fashion of him was different in his youth. But there was nobody in his youth to give us any record of the dry and industrious student whose curiously keen faculties, knocking up against the walls of tradition and legal fiction on one side, and burrowing at the roots of law and metaphysics on the other, could not rest till they had offered substitutes for all the antiquated wisdom of the ages, and replaced every time-honoured expedient with a novelty. His own recollections of the past, carefully collected by Dr. Bowring from the conversations which, under the tender title of Bo, and amid much petting and fondness, he held with his master—are rather gossip about other and chiefly unknown personages, than revelations of himself. From these, however, we gather that he began his consciousness of life as a frightened little boy, cultivated into the proportions of an infant prodigy by a vain father, who was proud of his babyish proficiencies, and pounced upon every sign of faculty, even in the way of dancing and drawing, both pursuits odious to the child, with an eagerness which drove young Jeremy into childish secretiveness, and shut his heart (if he had one) against his too admiring parent. He was educated at Westminster School and Queen's College, Oxford, where he was entered, a dwarfish weak-kneed boy, at twelve and a quarter, carrying with him a high reputation and the nickname of the little philosopher. He took his degree at sixteen, and was hurried through his terms at Lincoln's Inn with all possible celerity. But it would seem that the father's love or vanity was, at first, grievously disappointed when the results of this rapid training were

looked for. We are able to fish out from a mass of irrelevant matter the following account of the first step he made in life. It occurs in a statement of his horror and dismay at finding that his father had betrayed the secret of his authorship of the work in question, his complaint on which subject occupies far more space than the novel little bit of self-disclosure which follows.

“For some time before the publication of the ‘Fragment,’ I had been regarded in the light of a lost child ; despair had succeeded to the fond hopes which something of prematurity in my progress had inspired. On my being called to the bar I found a case or two at nurse for me. My first thought was how to put them to death, and the endeavours were not, I believe, altogether without success. Not long after, a case was brought to me for my opinion. I ransacked all the codes. My opinion was right according to the codes ; but it was wrong according to a manuscript unseen by me, and inaccessible to me—a manuscript containing the report, I know not of what opinion, said to have been delivered before I was born, and locked up, as usual, for the purpose of being kept back or produced according as occasion served. . . . My optics were to such a degree disturbed, that to my eyes the imperfections of this phantom rule of action seemed only errors calling for an easy remedy. I had not learned how far they served as sources of wealth, power, and factitious dignity. I had contracted—oh, horrible !—that unnatural and at that time almost unexampled appetite, the love of innovation. . . .

“The reader cannot have gone through the first sentence in the ‘Fragment,’ without having seen the passion that gave rise to it—the passion for improvement—I mean in these shapes in particular in which the lot of mankind is meliorated by it, a passion which has been rekindled by recent incidents, and is not likely to be extinguished but with life ; a passion for improvement in every line, but more particularly in the most important of all lines—the line of government. At an age a few months before or after seven years, the first embers of it were kindled by Telemachus. By an early pamphlet of Priestley’s, the date of which has fled from my recollection, light was added to the warmth. In the phrase ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number,’ I then saw delineated, for the first time, a plain as well as a true standard for whatever is right or wrong, useful, useless, or mischievous in human conduct, whether in the field of morals or politics. It was, I think, in my twenty-



second year that I saw in it the foundation of what seemed to me the only correct instruction or encyclopædical arrangement—a map or chart of the field of thought and action. It is the same map which stands in the work entitled ‘Chrestomathia.’ I felt the sensation of Archimedes when I committed the first rough and imperfect outline to one side of a half-sheet of paper, which, not entirely useless, served, I hope, to kindle a more substantial flame.

“No sooner had my farthing candle been taken out of the bushel than I looked for the descent of torches to it from the highest regions; my imagination presented to my view torches descending in crowds to borrow its fire. Of disposition, in the midst of such excellence with which, as all pens and all voices concurred in assuring me I was so abundantly encompassed, I could not suspect any deficiency; for clearing away the imperfections which still remained in government, all that was wanting was a few of those lights which, I could not tell how, had happened to take my mind for their first visiting place.”

The astonishment with which he discovered that this was not the case, that nobody wished to be enlightened by him with those new lights which were to banish all darkness, gradually worked further discoveries in Bentham’s mind. But, in the meantime, his position outwardly was not a comfortable one. His father, though deriving some satisfaction from the publication of the *Fragment*, which, being brought out anonymously, was attributed to various great personages until his vanity betrayed the secret and stopped the sale—was disappointed and angry, “always out of spirits for my want of success.” “Mine was truly a miserable life,” Bentham says. “I had been taken notice of by the great when a little boy at Westminster School; for I was an object of praise from the earliest time of which I have any recollection. *That* filled me with ambition. But I met with all sorts of rebukes and disappointments till I was asked to Bowood.”

It was the appearance of the *Fragment* which procured him the notice of Lord Shelburne, afterwards Lord Lansdowne, and this invitation to Bowood which was so

great a crisis in the life of the thrifty, industrious, self-occupied, young philosopher. He got rid of his father's constant visits and importunities about his work, which galled him greatly, for the elder Bentham (not unnaturally, some people will think) made frequent investigations as to how the *Policy of Punishment* or the *Observations on the Hard Labour Bill* were going on; and it restored him to that notice of the great for which, philosopher as he was, he seems to have pined. The letters from this place form a curious record of the gossip of the time, and of the place which a man of inferior position, however distinguished, inevitably takes in a great house; and the flatteries and complacencies, the growing conviction that heaven and earth hold nothing so important as this noble family, the pride with which every new privilege is noted, furnish a strange commentary upon the philosopher's higher pretensions and impartial survey of mankind in general. What could the delights of science and learning give that was equal to admittance into Lady Shelburne's dressing-room, and all the talks and pleasantries and music that went on there, the ladies so austere and dignified, very prudes to other people, all sweetness and complaisance to him? Here, it appears, to give the scene its last seduction, Bentham found the only, and entirely hopeless, love of his life. The Miss F—— of his letters is a very easily deciphered hieroglyphic. She was inexorable, it would appear, and still inexorable when after sixteen years' separation they met again, and it became apparent that Bentham had not got over his passion. His biographer informs us that to the very end of his life "I have often heard him speak of that lady with tears in his eyes." One can scarcely help feeling that the hopelessness of the love must have been one of its attractions; for to imagine old Jeremy Bentham with his little train of followers, the queer little antiquated celibate, as

grotesque as anything that ever came out of the fancy of Dickens, in the position of a married man, the companion of a fair and fastidious lady, is beyond the power of mortal imagination.

His friendship with Bowood and all its sirens lasted some four or five years; and whether it was brought to an end at last by the presumption of a proposal on the part of the tame philosopher, whose very privilege of *entrée* to my lady's dressing-room no doubt signified that he was perfectly safe as an inmate, and not sentimentally dangerous to the most susceptible imagination, cannot be told—but it seems very possible that it may be so. He went to Russia afterwards with my lord's blessing and strenuous recommendations, and with a fine aim in the way of carrying with him every kind of possible amelioration and improvement for Russia, "under the auspices of Prince Potemkin, in whose service his brother was then engaged." The improvements came to little, so far as Russia was concerned; but Bentham, with the aid of his brother, there worked out a wonderful scheme called Panopticon, which for several years after his return was foremost in his thoughts. It was a design for a model prison of very peculiar construction, partly the invention of General, afterwards Sir Samuel Bentham—who had a great deal of genius in this way, and was also the inventor of a new kind of vessel called the vermicular, which Bentham was sanguine would work an entire change in navigation. The Panopticon was to be an immense circular building, with a great well in the middle, from which the gaolers were to superintend the whole range of convicts in the cells, where each was to work alone, one side of the cell being entirely open towards the centre, fully lighted night and day, and exposed to the continual inspection of the watchers in the middle. Minute details of the watching and regulations outside,

and of the manner of employing the prisoners within, were added to the scheme. And some of the details are curious enough. From the calculations given, it is clear that Bentham intended to feed his criminals chiefly or entirely upon potatoes. In point of clothing he considered stockings unnecessary unless on Sundays; shirts are also rejected as unnecessary, and the shoes were to be of wood, not leather. The most extraordinary feature in the plan was the system of continual inspection,—the unhappy prisoners being understood to be under the eye of their guardians constantly, sleeping and waking,—but the other details were likewise novel and startling, and the principle of providing for and maintaining the prisoners by contract, instead of by the indiscriminate use of the public money through public functionaries, was, to the mind of Bentham, a still more important one. The curious fact is that he all but carried his scheme, and was actually entrusted, by an Act of Parliament, with a thousand convicts to test it, when the king himself, whom Bentham had offended, stepped in and arrested the proceedings by giving his veto against the scheme. So far had matters gone that Bentham obtained from a subsequent Parliament the immense sum of £23,000 as compensation for the losses he had undergone in connection with it. Bentham himself had undertaken to be the contractor, the chief gaoler living among his prisoners. The importance of this plan could not be further proved than by the great sum thus granted as compensation. Notwithstanding that the existing system of prison management has been largely influenced by Bentham's suggestions, the fundamental idea strikes us as very extraordinary now, as well as many of the minor details—such as his hope to make the chapel, which was to be also in the centre of the building, on Sunday “a sort of place of public entertainment suitable to the day, like

that afforded by the Magdalen and the Asylum," a place where people could come to stare, like Asmodeus, at all the unhappy wretches whose life, in every detail, was gone through under an inspector's eye.

It must not be forgotten, however, that Howard had but lately opened the whole question of prison management, and given his heroic life to the cleansing and reformation of the dismal dens in which criminals were left to rot and die in body, and to corrupt each other mutually in mind. The light and air and publicity which were thus to be poured upon the place where felons bore their punishment was part of his system, and he had regarded the latter particular as a special safeguard against the evils of the old *régime*. Whether, however, Howard contemplated carrying publicity to such a pitch as to keep his unfortunate clients, night and day, under the inspection of their keepers, we are not informed. Bentham repeatedly asserted that but for George III. he should have had the management of all the convicts of England, and after them, of all the paupers, in his hands.

But this strange scheme came to nothing, as so many other benevolent enterprises of the kind have done. That it should have been so near success seems to us the most wonderful feature in it. It appears to have been one of the chief interests in Bentham's life for a great number of years. The plan was originated in 1788, propounded to Government in 1792, and only finally settled in 1811 by the payment above mentioned. Wilberforce speaks of Bentham's strong feeling on the subject and profound disappointment at its failure—a disappointment which certainly was of a generous kind; for the life he had proposed to himself as chief gaoler of a huge prison, living in his central chamber, in the midst of the most hardened and debased of criminals, is as unlike the scheme of existence which could have proved satisfactory to a philo-

sopher, as can be conceived. But he was very tedious and slow to relinquish any plan he had formed.

Bentham's attempts at the consolidation of the laws and formation of a penal code, were as unsuccessful, in a practical point of view, as his Panopticon. He neglected no opportunity of pressing his services upon every newly-formed or revolutionised nationality, from France—by which in the palmy days of the National Assembly he had been adopted as a citizen along with half-a-dozen other Englishmen—Russia (of which he had great hopes), and America—to such smaller sections of the world as Venezuela, to which he had a great mind to emigrate under the protection of Miranda, for the purpose of making it into a Utopia of political economy and philosophical legislation. But in the latter as in the former cases difficulties intervened, and the ever ready code, which he was continually retouching and perfecting, was nowhere adopted. At the very end of his life he wrote to one of his foreign correspondents, "I am alive though turned of eighty-two; still in good health and spirits, *codifying like any dragon*." Thus with a chirrup of obstinate fidelity as dauntless as any trumpet note, the old man stuck to his lifelong occupation, undaunted by the fact that all the world had refused his help in this particular. What he did succeed in was in sowing principles, suggestions, knowledge, broadcast among the classes of which legislation is the natural trade, perhaps as effectual a way of influencing the world as if he had been allowed to codify like a dragon, potentially as well as in his closet. Bentham was not one of the writers who have to wait long and wearily for recognition. His first *Fragment* gained him, as has been said, the happiest influence of his life, the friendship of Lord Lansdowne; and his reputation as an authority upon questions of law and political philosophy seems to have taken root from that period, and to

have remained unquestioned even by those who agreed the least with his views. He was not much over forty when the French Assembly conferred the honour of French citizenship upon him, "considering," as the patent sets forth with characteristic grandiloquence, "that at the moment when a National Convention is about to fix the destinies of France, and probably those of the human race, it belongs to a generous and free people to welcome all intelligence, and to grant the right of access to this great work of reason to men rendered worthy of it by their sentiments, their writings, and their valour!" What magnificent sentiments were these! and what an opportunity for Bentham, had he been able to take advantage of it! All that came to him from his offers of enlightenment to France was, however, the appointment of a committee of the Convention to report upon his Panopticon scheme, which never came to anything. But that his name and fame had travelled far is very apparent.

It is curious, however, to note in his case the benefits of patronage, as conferred by this short episode of Bowood. It made him acquainted with people whose acquaintance was in itself a kind of fame. It gave him his great disciple and expositor Dumont, a Frenchman who had been tutor to Lord Lansdowne's sons, and who, when once made acquainted with the philosopher, attached, like himself, to that noble house, made himself, for a great part of his life, the interpreter and high priest of Bentham, merging his own powers in those of his master, and communicating to France, with curious self-devotion, a better and more readable version of Bentham's principles than Bentham himself was able to give to his own country. Dumont was the most servicable of the many retainers whom Bentham attached to himself; but he had other disciples to whom his service was as that of a feudal superior. Notwithstanding the weird and uncanny aspect

of the old man, as he is revealed to us by Dr. Boyring, in his shrill levity and cheerfulness, there must have been attractive qualities in him. It is evident that he had an instinct like that of the Ancient Mariner, for the men who were born to hear and understand him, and great readiness in adopting into his affections every new notability whom he approved of. Mill, the sternest of thinkers, was for a considerable time his henchman and attendant; and he received an amount of service and devotion, which few of the greatest of mankind have gained from their fellow-creatures. It may be that his own entire detachment from family and natural ties had something to do with it, besides his power of helping in his turn, young men who gave up their time and independence to him; but it requires more than this to induce men of education and ability to undertake even the personal service of their philosophical master, as his young disciples who lived in his house, always two of them on duty, seem to have done—at least it is a return to mediæval fashions of discipleship with which we are little acquainted in the nineteenth century.

The reader will find some account of Bentham's system of philosophy farther on. It involves, directly in one group with him, the gentle and noble figure of James Mackintosh who assailed it, and the stern and harsh one of James Mill, who, with equal vigour and unmannerliness, made himself its champion. They were both Scotsmen, and Bentham did not like Scotsmen. But they were as unlike as it is possible to conceive. Before, however, passing on to these antagonists yet fellow-workmen, we must add a word or two to this record of their master. There is no notable person of his generation who is more open to ridicule. His excessive activity made him thrust into every difficult situation with an absence of that perception of absurdity which saves many men from open



folly. Perhaps there was a touch of chivalry, a remnant of the romantic courage which prompted a knight to offer himself as the champion of his country, as well as a wonderful amount of vanity and misapprehension of magnitudes in the philosopher's mind, when he proposed to Wilberforce (like himself a French citizen by patent of the National Assembly as one of the heroes of humanity) that they two should go to France as ambassadors to re-establish friendly relations between the two countries. The claims which he puts forth for himself in proof of his eligibility to this office are—1st, The order by the Assembly to print the Panopticon plan; 2d, An invitation from Talleyrand to go to Paris with the idea of setting up a Panopticon; 3d, The “flaming eulogiums of some extracts from my papers on the judicial establishment,” printed in periodicals directed by Mirabeau and by Brissot; with other exquisite reasons. Wilberforce quashed the scheme in a very brief note. “There is much in what you urge, and I will turn it in my mind; but I doubt if anything can be made of it”—but Lord St. Helens, to whom it was also referred, took the trouble to enter into an elaborate explanation of the impossibilities of the plan. This was probably a mere bubble of the combative and active mind of the philosopher, but it has a very grotesque aspect among the many restless offers and schemes of his life. The prodigious letter, or rather pamphlet, in the form of a letter (sixty-one pages) which we find in another place addressed to Lord Lansdowne, and taking his patron to task for not putting him into Parliament as Bentham understood him to have promised to do, is another proof that some impulses of ambition, apart from his science and his schemes of public improvement, legislative and otherwise, occasionally crossed his mind. The following statement, however, of the relative position and importance of his own and the philosophical systems which

preceded his, reaches a much higher point, and may be reckoned as the very sublimation of self-applause.

“What Bacon did was to proclaim *Fiat experimentum*; but his own knowledge of natural philosophy was ignorance.

“What Locke did was to destroy the notion of innate ideas;

“What Newton did was to throw light on one branch of science.

“But I have planted the tree of Utility—I have planted it deep and spread it wide.”

Of his opinions on literature in general not much is to be said. “What I read of Socrates is insipid,” he says. “I could find in him nothing that distinguished him from other people, except his manner of putting questions.” Coming down to an age more near our own, he informs us, “I never read poetry with enjoyment. I read Milton as a duty. Hudibras for the story and the fun;” so that, presumably, as poetry, Lycidas and Hudibras ranked on about the same level in the philosopher’s mind. And his mention of Milton at all was, perhaps, suggested by the fact that it was Milton’s house in which he was living, a fact which had induced the old Jeremy, Bentham’s father, to buy a portrait of the poet, and put up an inscription in the garden to his memory. When discoursing of his contemporaries, Bentham speaks of the “servile poet and novelist Walter Scott,” and the “ultra-servile sack-guzzler Southey.” “I shall laugh heartily to see your figure in the neighbourhood of those reptiles Scott and Southey,” replies his correspondent the mild-mouthed and modest Parr. Thus the philosophers communed together. On the other hand, we must add a few words of a more genial kind, an old man’s summing up of his philosophy, which exhibits him in a very different light. It was written for a lady, who wished for his autograph a few months before his death.

“The way to be comfortable is to make others comfortable.

“The way to make others comfortable is to appear to love them.

"The way to appear to love them is to love them in reality.

"*Probatur ab experientia* per Jeremy Bentham, Queen's Square Place, Westminster. Born 15th February anno 1748; written 24th October 1831."

This little matter-of-fact periphrasis of the great Christian rule puts the philosopher in a happier light. But the queer figure of the old man shuffling about his garden, his white hair streaming from under a straw hat, legs and arms muffled up in shapeless woollen: or "vibrating" round the platform upon which his table and chairs and bookcase were placed, indoors, his teapot "Dick" singing over the lamp, his confidential friend in waiting, attended by two young secretaries—"reprobates" in the quaint language of the house—makes one of the strangest of domestic pictures. It is far more like a picture out of Dickens than a scene of actual life. While the guests were still present the queer little old man was undressed, by one of the disciples, his nightcap tied on, his old eyes bathed—his old voice running on all the time in a perpetual shrill chatter of elaborate jokes and chirrupings. Never was a stranger comic-tragic figure, yet nothing solemn in it, more like an ape of genius chattering and tricksy, than one of the great minds that inspire an age. But such he was, in his strange all-laborious way.

The name of James Mackintosh is one which possesses more of that personal attraction in which, curiously enough, the figures of the past vary as much as do those of our personal acquaintances, than either of the historians and philosophers already noted. He was one of the men never so successful as they seem to have a right to be, who awaken great expectations, and now and then attain great though evanescent triumphs, but by some failure of fortune, or absence of faculty, never rise to the height which appears their due, or get any consolidation of this fluctuating and

never fully accomplished fame. He was the son, of a Highland laird, and himself the heir of a little northern property, with which, however, he soon parted by that almost inevitable process of getting rid of what they have, which young men born to a small fortune so generally go through. He was full of faculty and genius from his earliest years—the fact that it must be Jamie Mackintosh being at once recognised in the countryside, when a learned stranger told the story of his encounter, on a country road, with a remarkable boy. He was a “spontaneous child,” some old observer said of him, and there could not be a more attractive description. And he was a dreamer as well. “I used to fancy myself Emperor of Constantinople,” he says. “I distributed offices and provinces among my schoolfellows, I loaded my favourites with dignity and power, and I often made the objects of my dislike feel the weight of my imperial resentment. I carried on the series of political events in solitude;”—and he adds that this habit continued with him all his life, not in the more common way of imagining success and triumphs for himself in his proper pursuits, but in weavings of imagination as far removed from reality as the crown of Constantinople was from the schoolroom at Fortrose. “I have no doubt,” he adds, “that many a man surrounded by piles of folios, and apparently engaged in the most profound researches, is in reality often employed in distributing the offices and provinces of the empire of Constantinople.” But this dreamer was no inactive boy. The spontaneous life in him poured forth in all channels. When he was but thirteen he got up a debating society in his school, and harangued the Inverness-shire lads “till his soprano voice failed.” “One day he was Fox, another Burke, or some leading member of the Opposition; and when no one ventured to reply to his arguments, he would change sides for the moment, personate North, and

endeavour to combat what he conceived the strongest parts of his own speech. I was greatly surprised and delighted with his eloquence in his character of Fox against some supposed or real measure of the prime minister." Thus the little actor conned his mimic part, little thinking how soon he was to find a place among those he imitated.

At fifteen Mackintosh went to Aberdeen to college, and there fell into a course of reading which helped to direct many of his after efforts. Warburton's *Divine Legation*, he thinks, perhaps "tainted my mind with a fondness for the twilight of historical hypothesis; but certainly inspired me with that passion for investigating the history of opinions, which has influenced my reading through life." Here he met Robert Hall, the future great preacher, and the two ardent boys, both golden-mouthed and full of dawning eloquence, living together in the same bare half-furnished house, walking together on the sands, in the roar of these northern seas which half drowned their eager young voices, discussed and reasoned of every subject on earth and heaven. The young Englishman was orthodox in the strictest sense of the word, the young Scot, who at fourteen had been "the boldest heretic in the county," a daring speculator and questioner: and the subjects upon which they differed were much more numerous than those on which they agreed. During one winter they met at five o'clock every morning in the cold and dark "to read Greek"—a third youth, no doubt one of those devoted and admiring retainers who are always to be found on the path of the young heroes of the universities, getting up to make coffee for them: and this early meeting: the two youthful faces over their books, most likely by the light of one poor candle, the friendly ministrant coaxing his fire into brightness, the fumes of the boyish cookery—and, no doubt, the little interval of jest that would come into the midst of Plato or Herodotus. as

the three youths warmed themselves with the smoking coffee, furnishes us with a pleasant scene. The future statesman and the future preacher struggled and wrangled and were never still, loving and confuting each other with all the warmth of fervid youth. To Hall, Mackintosh always appeared to have "an intellect more analogous to that of Bacon than any person of modern times;" while to Mackintosh, a somewhat careless youth, with a warm love of pleasure and no very straitened creed, "the transparency of his friend's conduct and the purity of his principles" inspired a respect which he describes as awe. Altogether there could not have been a more interesting conjunction.

Mackintosh left college at nineteen, having taken his degree—a course more rational surely than the long extended preliminary training of the present time: and though he would have preferred the bar or to be a bookseller (an idea which filled his advisers with consternation), he became neither, but began his studies for the medical profession. It was in this capacity that he went to London, a lively young man of twenty-three, more distinguished in all the debating societies than in the schools, although there, too, his comprehensive genius held its own. It was not, however, as a physician but as a speaker, in the ferment of the political societies which were universal at the time, that Mackintosh made his first success in London. It is clear that nothing attracted him so much as that art of oratory which, in his then circumstances, he could practise only as a relaxation. This kind of relaxation, however, combined with others less legitimate, swallowed up altogether the life of the young man, who, though a Scotsman, was as prodigal, lavish, and incautious as most of the young Scotsmen whom we have previously encountered in these volumes have been. At the moment when he was thus afloat in London, with no settled pros-

pects, his little Highland estate, newly come into his hand on the death of his father, already beginning to melt away in his careless keeping, Mackintosh took a step which to most wise people would seem the most imprudent of all, but which immediately replaced him in the way of salvation. He married and returned to the hopes and possibilities of more practical life. It was not very long after this event that he won his spurs in literature, suddenly leaping into the midst of the fray and striking upon the shield of no neophyte like himself, but of the most distinguished of warriors, the great Burke, the most eloquent and potent champion against whom young assailant ever tried his powers—as if a young Lovaine with maiden arms had defied Lancelot himself. The occasion was that centre of all the excitement and commotion of the time,—the French Revolution : against which Burke had arisen at once to denounce with half-prophetic force, and at the cost both of friendships and traditions, its dangerous tendencies. So strong was the feeling, and so many were the sympathisers in favour of the new outburst of freedom and popular rights, that answers came forth on all sides to this attack. Among these was the well-known *Rights of Man* by Thomas Paine. Neither the great Burke nor his violent adversary belongs to our period : but when James Mackintosh, young, unsettled, and not knowing what to do with himself, full of the ardent hopes and strong political feeling of his generation, seeing in the great events on the other side of the Channel the self-emancipation of a heroic nation and the beginning of a new era of freedom and life, came forth before the world with his *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*, his apology and justification of the Revolution, which as yet had not dipped its garments in blood, he was as true an embodiment as could have been found of the new age, full of hope and warm idealism and that certainty of being able to better the world, and

turn evil into good, which is one of the finest characteristics of noble youth.

The *Vindiciæ* was an eloquent and glowing defence of the French nation and its leaders, and of the spirit, as yet all undeveloped and apparently containing in it the germ of every heroic quality, of the new revolution. Its arguments are not without suspicion of sophism and special pleading, but its generous inspiration and hot and eager championship, made up of the natural English desire to see fair play, and the warm enthusiasm for liberty of the young England of the moment, are very potent and attractive. The impression made by it was great. The first edition was published in April 1791, and by August of the same year the third had been called for. It was from the obscurity of a cottage at Little Ealing, where the young medical man, who certainly had not been successful, nor perhaps had much tried to be successful, in that profession, had retired for economy and quiet, and very likely with the intention of weaning himself from the temptations of town—that this generous plea for France and freedom, and the hopes of a new world, came forth. His young wife, no doubt with many an anxiety in her mind, not only for the bread of the children who began to gather about the rash pair, but for the vindication to the world of those powers which had as yet been little more than wasted upon political societies and fruitless debates—sat by him silent as a mouse, not permitted even the resource of that endless needlework which a young mother, in those days, had more completely upon her hands than now, scarcely turning the pages of her book lest she should disturb him as he worked. One can scarcely help feeling that her presence meant a certain moral compulsion and guardianship to keep him to his work, which, it is allowed, he needed in those days.

But this was an end of the obscurity and unsuccess of



the young Scotsman. His book was received with applause everywhere. Fox, who had separated himself from his brother-in-arms in consequence of the *Reflections*, to which it was an answer, and Burke himself, who was magnanimous enough to appreciate the writer's admiration and respect even through the fervour of his attack, both praised his performance; and young Mackintosh stepped at once out of his obscurity into the acquaintance of the world. Perhaps it was the new vigour given by success which prompted him more definitely to abandon the profession of medicine, for which it is evident he never felt any enthusiasm, and to adopt that of the law, which was much more congenial to his mind. He was called to the bar in 1795, and by that time had fully entered upon the craft of literature as well. The nature of the man is well exemplified in the fact that within four or five years after the production of the *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*, his frank and reasonable soul, unfettered by those artificial bonds of consistency which a young man is so often afraid to break, had owned the rashness of his own plea, and abandoned the uncompromising defence of France, which, possible in 1791, was no longer possible after the Terror. His reviews of Burke's subsequent publications on the same subject, brought him to the personal knowledge of the great writer and statesman, to whom he made haste to express his profound regard and veneration. "From the earliest moment of reflection your writings have been my chief study and delight," he says. "For a time, indeed, seduced by the love of what I thought liberty, I ventured to oppose, without ever ceasing to venerate, that writer who had nourished my understanding with the most wholesome principles of political wisdom. . . . Since that time a melancholy experience has undeceived me on many subjects in which I was then the dupe of my own enthusiasm. I cannot say (and you would despise me if I dissembled)

that I can even now assent to all your opinions on the present politics of Europe. But I can with truth affirm that I subscribe to your general principles." This is deeply interesting as affording us an example, very rare in the literature of the time, of the effect produced upon candid and generous minds by the downfall into blood and outrage of the first fair hopes of the Revolution. But Mackintosh carried a peculiarly sensitive mental thermometer, and was always ready to admit those modifications of opinion which life, whether we admit them or not, is sure to bring.

He had not long been called to the bar when he appeared before the world in a series of *Lectures on the Law of Nature and Nations*, delivered, after some demur on the part of the benchers, in the Great Hall of Lincoln's Inn, of which he was a member. It is not to be wondered at that a serious and conservative body should have hesitated before permitting the defender of revolution and of that nation which, for at least one terrible moment, had abrogated law altogether, to discourse upon such a subject under its sanction and authority. But the result justified the confidence which, not without trembling, they had put in him; and his lectures were received with large approval and admiration. His setting forth of the two great institutions of property and marriage as the foundation of relative duties afforded a contrast which men who had lately risen from the first exciting perusal of the *Political Justice* of Godwin would feel in its fullest extent; and his definition of Liberty must have solaced many troubled imaginations, blown up and down by the wild philosophies and still wilder events of the age. "Men are more free," he wrote, "under any government, even the most imperfect, than they would be if it were possible for them to exist without any government at all. They are more secure from wrong, more undisturbed in the exercise of

their natural powers, and therefore more free, even in the most obvious and grossest sense of the word, than if they were altogether unprotected against injury from each other." But this was a wonderful departure from the ideas and hopes of the dawning of Freedom. His disgust with the further developments of contemporary history has all the warmth of disappointment in its strong expression.

"There is nothing in public matters to speak of," he writes in 1800, when the Consulate had just been established, "except the last extraordinary revolution in France, which has rooted up every principle of democracy in that country, and banished the people from all concern in the government, not for a season, as former usurpers pretended, but for ever, if this accursed revolution is destined to be permanent. . . . It is my intention, in this winter's lectures, to profess publicly and unequivocally that I abhor, abjure, and for ever renounce the French Revolution with all its sanguinary history, its abominable principles, and for ever execrable leaders. I hope I shall be able to wipe off the disgrace of having once been betrayed into an approbation of that conspiracy against God and man, the greatest scourge of the world, and the chief stain upon human annals. But I feel," he adds, "that I am transported by my subject to the borders of rant."

The warmth of this revulsion, however, again troubled him when, looking back from a distance and from comparative tranquillity upon all the agitations of this period, he confides to a friend the final form of his matured ideas, "As a political philosopher," he says, "I will not say that I now entirely approve the very shades and tones of political doctrine which distinguished these lectures. I can easily see that I rebounded from my original opinions too far towards the opposite extreme; I was carried too far by anxiety to atone for my former errors." These changes of a sensitive soul, disturbed out of all the traditions of well-balanced thought by the extraordinary events happening around him, are more interesting and instructive to the distant spectator than all the dogmas of consistency;

though at the same time we cannot but admit that such candour has its dangers too, and that the position of a man always conscious that there is much to be said on the other side, has an element of insecurity in it. There were people, of course, who said that James Mackintosh's recantation was brought about by interested motives; it is one of our greatest advantages in the present day that such imputations are rare, and that writers of honourable feeling are slow to suggest a dishonourable motive. The variations of his sensitive mind, as he was thus driven from one side to the other, take an altogether different aspect when we read how they appeared to Bentham looking on with cynical, yet not unkind spectatorship: —

“When I saw you,” says the elder philosopher, “enlisted in the defence of a castle of straw, which I had turned my back upon as fit for nothing but the fire, I beheld with regret what appeared to me a waste of talents so unprofitably employed. When I heard of you being occupied in teaching the anatomy and physiology of two chimeras, the same sensation was again repeated. A crowd of admiring auditors of all ranks—and what was it they wished or expected? Each of them some addition to the stock of sophisms which most of them had been able to mount by his own genius, or pick up by his own industry, in readiness to be employed in the service of right or wrong, whichever happened to be the first to present the retaining fee.”

After the lectures, which had attracted a great deal of attention, Mackintosh made his way into the more usual honours of his profession. He tells his wife in a letter, of a great speech he had made, which he felt to be full of commonplaces, but which filled “the whole county of Norfolk,” assembled at Norwich, with rapture. “Half the court was drowned in tears,” and the attorneys, deeply impressed, rushed round him with briefs. Some time after he made a still greater and more important appearance in London, where he defended a certain M. Peltier, an *émigré*, and the editor of a furious little paper called

the *Ambigu*, in which the First Consul had been fiercely attacked. The great Erskine wrote to compliment the comparatively unknown young barrister upon his "most powerful and eloquent speech;" and the counsel for the prosecution began his own address with the expression of a fear that "after the attention of the jury had been so long riveted to one of the most splendid displays of eloquence he ever had occasion to hear," his speech would have but little chance. Immediately after, while the firmament was still ringing with these plaudits, Mackintosh accepted an appointment as Recorder of Bombay, which seems to have been a rather rash and unwary proceeding—a sort of sacrifice of the birds in the bush to the one in hand, which poverty and impatience combined, so often force a man into. It would have been natural to expect that such brilliant appearances would have instantly increased his profits at the bar, and opened a career to him in his profession at home; but, whatever his motives were, the decision was made, and in 1804, with the usual knight-hood which distinguishes a judge, but not without misgiving, he banished himself from the scene of all his triumphs to the never congenial sphere of India. "I am waiting," he says, in his last letter written from England, "in hourly expectation of the ship which is to convey me far from those scenes of civilisation and literature in which I once, in the fond ambition of youth, dreamt that I might perhaps have acted a considerable part. Experience has refused my ambition . . . and reason informs me that there is no country in which I may not discharge a part of the debt which I owe to mankind. I do not, however, affect to leave my country without pain." So engaging is Mackintosh's character, and so easy seems the impulse that might have turned him to a better and more glorious path, that vain as is the reflection, it is scarcely possible for the reader not to feel a pang of regret at his rash

abandonment of the field, and a pained and impatient sense of what might have been had he not taken so fatal a step. He was in India seven years, which was so much time lost in respect to his career, a period full of possibilities never to be recovered. He seems to have felt, through all his time of banishment, a sense of the mistake he had made, and there is a kind of sigh in the following note, made on his voyage home, which is more touching than many louder lamentations :---

"It has happened by the merest accident that the *Trial of Peltier* is among the books in the cabin. But when I recollect the way in which you saw me opposed to Percival on the 21st of February 1803 (the day of the trial), and when I compare his present situation, whether at the head of an administration or an opposition, with mine, scanty as is my stock of fortune, health, or spirits, in a cabin nine feet square on the Indian Ocean, I think it enough that I am free from the sourness of disappointment, and I need not conceal from my other self that I feel some surprise."

It was little wonder that he should feel surprise at such a contrast. To be a statesman at the head of imperial affairs instead of a superannuated Indian judge, many men would have accepted the sad and sudden end which put so startling a conclusion to the happier rival's career. Mackintosh came back with a pension of £1200 a year, broken health, and a general separation from all the ways of advancement. A faint possibility, however, that something worthy of his powers might yet open upon him, existed at first. He was offered by Percival, immediately on his arrival in England, a seat in Parliament (the words read curiously nowadays), with a prospect of further promotion afterwards. But he declined to come into the House as a Government nominee on account of his opinion on the Catholic Disabilities. Percival's murder occurred at the very moment when his reply to this offer was written, and none of the political leaders who followed took any trouble about Mackintosh. He found

an independent seat in the House of Commons some time after; and at a later period was made a privy councillor. But this empty honour and the privilege of having right honourable to his name was all he ever came to. Vague intentions of service and much general admiration and well-wishing attended him, beside the appreciation of society for one of the most brilliant and entertaining of its members; but this was all. In 1818 he became Professor of Law and Politics in the Indian college at Haileybury. After his brilliant beginning, and the place which he always occupied in public life, it is strange to see the fine pleader, the experienced politician, the admired conversationalist, a name continually recurring in all the highest records of the national life, drop into such an appointment at last as would not have been too much for him to expect when he started from Edinburgh thirty-five years before, in all the brilliant faculty and hope of youth.

We cannot pass over without notice the friendship which existed between Mackintosh and Madame de Staël, and which associated him constantly for a time with that remarkable woman, whose appearance wherever she went alarmed and excited the men of letters of her day in the most curious way, with a whimsical mixture of panic and dislike. Mackintosh, it is evident, felt nothing of this amusing terror: and the lady proved her discrimination by a warm preference for his society. "She treats me," he says, "as the person she most delights to honour. I am generally ordered with her to dinner, as one orders beans with bacon." She, on her part, made no secret of her regard: "*C'est très ennuyeux de dîner sans vous, et la société ne va pas quand vous n'êtes pas là,*" she writes, and even in Paris finds no one equal to him. It is evident, however, that Madame de Staël had fathomed his character as well as she appreciated it. We find her writing to

Lady Mackintosh of a favourite plan she had, which was to induce Sir James to settle, like Gibbon, on the Lake of Geneva to finish his history. "Que pensez-vous de ce projet?" she says. "Sir James est un peu incertain de sa nature, et je ne crois point à son histoire si vous n'êtes pas le pouvoir exécutif de cette entreprise." When we read this we cannot but remember the young wife who sat by Mackintosh's side, not venturing to turn the leaf lest she should disturb him while he wrote his *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*. It was a second Lady Mackintosh to whom the brilliant Frenchwoman wrote, and she, though evidently a most congenial and faithful companion, does not seem to have had the strength or patience to be thus the "pouvoir exécutif."

Between the early blaze of eloquence and enthusiasm which dazzled the world in the *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*, and the later works which retain a more permanent place in the literature of the country, there is a long, and we can scarcely help thinking, a painful interval. The *Dissertation on Ethical Philosophy* was not completed till 1830, two years before his death. His history, of which he had begun to compose stray pages during his voyage from India in 1812, changed in form and scope, and, shorn of much of its intended importance, did not begin to appear till the same year. And his most important historical work, that in which his whole powers were put forth, and where he had full opportunity for the development of the philosophy of history, his favourite study, was one which he did not live to complete, and which, so much as was completed of it, was given to the world after his death, without the revision or correction which he would certainly have given, and by hands altogether destitute of his skill and genius. The Revolution of 1688, which was the beginning of a new era in the national life, had thus occupied in turn two of the greatest minds among English politicians and



statesmen at the very end of their career, a curious and touching coincidence. The subject, which had dropped from Fox's dying fingers, fell also from those of the successor whom Fox applauded in his youth, and who, after the struggles and disappointments of a lifetime, took up the half-executed task, only to leave it in his turn a noble fragment, a preparation for greater things. It is hardly possible to think of this but as the filling up of that measure of disappointment, of unfulfilment, which was the lot of James Mackintosh. Had he been able to accomplish this, a certain compensation for wasted life and fruitless hopes might have been his; he would have done what it had been the ambition of the noblest of his party to do, and set forth with all the force of a philosophical inquirer those principles which had changed the face of England and established a new rule, the rule of modern civilisation and reason, through many drawbacks and the absence of all poetic grace, over all the romantic traditions, sentiments, and attractions of the old. It would have been, one might have thought, a way of making up for so many things which had failed in his life and to his hopes. But it was not so. This last and greatest work came imperfect, with burial wreaths about it, maimed and incomplete, to the world: and thus the last word of unaccomplished hope, of a success never so great as it should have been, of efforts balked and labours unfulfilled, was said.

For the sake of the succession and inheritance which followed, we may quote what Macaulay says of his great predecessor.

"We have no hesitation in pronouncing (in the *Edinburgh Review*, July 1835) this fragment decidedly the best history now extant of the reign of James II. It contains much new and curious information, of which excellent use has been made. . . . We expected to find, and we have found, many just delineations of character

and many digressions full of interest, such as the account of the order of Jesuits, and of the state of prison discipline in England a hundred and fifty years ago. We expected to find, and we have found, many reflections breathing the spirit of a calm and benignant philosophy. But we did not, we own, expect to find that Sir James could tell a story as well as Voltaire or Hume. . . . The most superficial reader must be charmed, we think, by the liveliness of the narrative. But no person who is not acquainted with that vast mass of intractable materials of which the valuable and interesting part has been extracted and condensed, can fully appreciate the skill of the writer. Here, and throughout the work, we find many harsh and careless expressions, which the author would probably have removed if he had lived to complete his work. But, in spite of these blemishes, we must say that we should find it difficult to point out in any modern history any passage of equal length, and, at the same time, of equal merit. We find in it the diligence, the accuracy, and the judgment of Hallam, united to the vivacity and colouring of Southey. A history of England written throughout in this manner would be the most fascinating book in the language. *It would be more in request at the circulating libraries than the last novel.*"

As the utterance of the writer who, taking up Mackintosh's subject, exactly fulfilled the prophecy of the last sentence, there is an amusing appropriateness in the quotation. Macaulay, though he belongs to a younger generation, with which at present we have nothing to do, was in this, as in some other respects, the reverse of all that has been said of Mackintosh, a man born to success as the latter was to disappointment.

We began by remarking upon the curious personal attraction which even through the medium of a somewhat dull biography, one figure out of the past, among many who touch us not at all save intellectually and historically, will exercise upon the reader. In this way a tender radiance glows about the name of a man who was not one of those magicians who have a natural spell over our hearts, who was no poet but a philosopher, lawyer, and politician, and who has been set before us by no skilful hand, such as that of those biographers who have made a

distinct revelation of their subject, from great Plato to little Bozzy. Mackintosh had not even this advantage. He shows forth dimly through the opaque medium of his memoirs, or in the merest momentary gleam in the recollections of his contemporaries, but never without the attraction—perhaps of that same quality, first of all, which the keen-sighted old Scotswoman noted, who called him a “spontaneous child.” He is always natural, unaffected, answering to the influences of his time, without *parti pris* or thought of his consistency, or of himself at all. We may add from the same critic whom we have already quoted, a few lines full of feeling and affectionate regard, written after Mackintosh’s death.

“All the lines of that venerable countenance are before us, all the little peculiar cadences of that voice from which scholars and statesmen loved to receive the lessons of a serene and benevolent wisdom, are in our ears. . . . In his most familiar talk there was no wildness, no inconsistency, no dreaming nonsense, no exaggeration for the sake of momentary effect. His mind was a vast magazine admirably arranged; everything was there. . . . It would have been strange indeed if you had asked for anything that was to be found in that immense storehouse. The article which you required was not only there; it was ready. . . . He was singularly mild, calm, and impartial in his judgments of men and of parties.”

James Mill was of the same country as Mackintosh—a Northern Scot, though not of Celtic race. This latter circumstance may partly account for the difference between them, which was as great as if half a world had lain between their places of birth. To come suddenly out of the genial presence of the one into the gloomy companionship of the other involves a greater shock of difference than could we pass in a moment from Italy to Iceland. Mill was one of the sternest and most rigid representatives of that northern race which, notwithstanding the very different qualities of the names which make it illustrious, has so continued to retain its con-

ventional character for harshness and coldness that we are almost forced to believe there must be some truth in the imputation. There would be so if the Devil's advocate could produce many such men as James Mill to counterbalance Scott and Mackintosh as specimens of the character of their countrymen. He was the son of a humble family in the district of Angus; and, as many other promising lads have done, attracted the attention of those about him by his early abilities, and was sent to college to be trained for the ministry of the Scotch Church—the one outlet in which rustic genius was sure of finding an opening. The peculiarity in his case was, that it was not his own family who pinched and scraped to procure him an education, as so many have done, but that he owed his training to a gentleman of the neighbourhood, Sir John Stuart, who divined his powers. When his education was completed, he found himself unable “to believe the doctrines of that or any other church,” his son informs us; and though “licensed as a preacher,” this grim and formidable intellectual agent never in any way carried out the purpose of his education. After a few years which he spent in the work of a tutor, he boldly launched himself upon London. In one of Bentham's rambling recollections, he describes himself as having “taken up Mill when he was in great distress, and on the point of migrating to Caen” (of all places in the world!). He is said by the same authority to have had an annuity from the nobleman to whom he had been tutor. • For some years after their first meeting, his connection with Bentham was very close. “He and his family lived with me a half of every year from 1808 to 1817,” the philosopher says. They were in the habit of accompanying Bentham to his summer residence, whatever it might be—to Ford Abbey especially, a beautiful old house which he rented for a number of years, where

the younger man came with "his wife and family and a servant," a large addition to the bachelor household. It was no small proof of the natural amiability of old Jeremy, by this time between sixty and seventy, that he should have tolerated the presence of a brood of youngsters, even when one of them was the wonderful boy, afterwards fully revealed to the world which had previously known only the outside of him, in the autobiography of John Stuart Mill. Many other advantages evidently came to the family from the friendship of Bentham. "I brought him and his family hither from Pentonville," the old philosopher goes on; "I put them into Milton's house (afterwards his own dwelling-place), where his family were all at ease. Afterwards I gave him the lease of the house he holds, and put it in repair for him." This house was next door to his own in Queen's Square Place, and thus Mill was established under his master's wing. John Stuart Mill, very likely unaware of the great obligations of his father to his benefactor, or seeing them from a different point of view, yet adds, in his curious account of his own extraordinary education, his sense that his sojourn at Ford Abbey as a boy was "an important circumstance" in it. "The middle-age architecture, the baronial hall, and the spacious and lofty rooms of this fine old place, so unlike the mean and cramped external of English middle-class life, gave the sentiment of a larger and freer existence, and were to me a sort of poetic cultivation," he says. The account of the intercourse—as reported on both sides is very characteristic. Bentham's is given with a kind of careless liberality, a good-natured half contempt for the circumstances of the poor man, to whom he evidently felt he had been a kind of providence. But the son of that poor man has no idea of any such relationship. "I do not know how soon after my father's arrival in England they became ac-

quainted," John Stuart Mill says with dignity ; " but my father was the earliest Englishman of any great mark who thoroughly understood, and in the main adopted, Bentham's general views of ethics, government, and law." A cynic would smile at the difference between the point of view of the conscious benefactor and that of the family he served ; a contrast of feeling so common, almost invariable, so long as such relations last, with perhaps a little too much claimed on the one side, and too little given on the other.

Notwithstanding these potential services and kindnesses, however, Bentham was under no delusion as to the amiability of his disciple and companion. " He will never willingly enter into discourse with me," he says. " When he differs, he is silent. He is a character ; he expects to subdue everybody by his domineering tone, to convince everybody by his positiveness. His manner of speaking is oppressive and overbearing ; he comes to me as if he wore a mask on his face." And there were occasional breaches between them, as is apparent from a strange letter written by Mill to Bentham in Ford Abbey, when they were living under the same roof, proposing that they should separate at the end of the summer, in consequence of some real or supposed coldness on Bentham's part, but that this separation should be effected without a word said, either between themselves or to others—a characteristic way of conducting a quarrel. During the time of this close intercourse " he was writing his *British India*, while I was writing all manner of things," Bentham adds. The *History of India* was Mill's first work, and the foundation of his fortunes. It was the first important work on the subject, and was of the most bold and trenchant character, entering fundamentally into the history of Eastern society and civilisation, and discussing freely, not only the means by which the East

India Company could justly regulate so great an empire, but also the failures and mistakes it had made. "His interests," says Bentham again, "he deems to be closely connected with mine, as he has a prospect of introducing a better system of judicial procedure in British India." That his son should describe the book, in the fulness of years and judgment, as "one of the most instructive histories ever written," is perhaps natural in any case; but it is still, notwithstanding so many new lights, a standard work, and one which no student of the affairs of that wonderful country could pass by. There could be no better testimony to the sense and judgment of the directors of the East India Company than the fact that the daring critic and historian, who had not certainly aimed at pleasing them in any way, received very shortly after the publication of this book an appointment in their service of the most responsible description, as one of the "Assistants of the Examiners of Indian Correspondence,—officers whose duty it was to prepare drafts of despatches for India, for consideration by the Directors." Thus uncompromising honesty and courage received their reward in a way by which rewards are but seldom attained.

After this Mill's career was prosperous, and his future assured. He had leisure for a considerable deal of miscellaneous literary work on the *Edinburgh*, and afterwards, when that was established under Bentham's auspices, on the *Westminster Review*, and replied in a hot and vigorous "Fragment on Mackintosh," to the strictures made upon Bentham's utilitarian system in Sir James Mackintosh's Dissertation. His *History of India* and *Analysis of the Human Mind* are his chief works, and would have been about all we should have known of James Mill but that he produced—a thing more rare than any history—one of the strangest compounds of human qualities and paradoxes which the world has known, a son, John Stuart

Mill, already quoted, faithfully named after his ancient patron, and the object of the most astounding training to which any unfortunate soul was ever subjected. The character of the man shines through the beginning of his son's autobiography as a light through a lantern. The picture thus afforded to us of a wondering half-scared child, whose keen uncommon intellect was able to respond like a machine to the guiding touch, with little sense of what was being accomplished in it—and of the father, alarming, serious, almost awful, a strange demi-god, unrelenting, but not unkind, enduring with a kind of stern patience the boy's appeals and mistakes, and bearing him up with the compulsion of a strong will and unfiring soul into regions far beyond the commerce of a child, is very curious and interesting. With the same indomitable perseverance and patience which were necessary to enable him in ten years' time, besides the constant necessities of pot-boiling for a large family, to write the *History of India*, this extraordinary Scotsman set himself to re-create a human soul, and did it triumphantly. making of a susceptible and sensitive nature, full of attractive weakness, credulity, and sentiment, an infant freethinker, a baby philosopher, a scholar in petticoats—a man, when he grew up, who knew almost everything except himself, and whose rigidity of second nature, the art and influence of his father, never ceased to jar against, yet never overcame, the docility and softness of the first. In the strange household thus revealed to us, there is no shadow of any woman, no sound of domestic chat, no genial companionship of brothers and sisters, but only a prolonged encounter of two wits, the one teaching, the other listening and obeying; the man without ruth or thought for the flesh and blood he is straining, the other with innocent child's eyes fixed upon that prominent figure, ready to follow till he dies. The only thing it



reminds us of is the painful training of a young acrobat, where the child obeying a lifted finger goes sheer on to risk any fall or mutilation, or death itself, nothing being worse to its scared faculties than the beating or vituperation which a mistake would occasion. Mill did not either whip or vituperate so far as appears, but his son, we can see even in the record, has his eye nervously, constantly, upon him from beginning to end: and a more extraordinary exhibition of the mental force which one nature can exercise upon another never was.

There are few things more curious than the revelation of such a mind and story, and it is a testimony to what we may call the universal imagination, the rudely symbolic faculty by which human nature classifies character. that this perfectly sincere and honest individual, in mind so much above the common level, in character so unusual, is the very embodiment of what we call the conventional, the popularly invented and received type—at once of a philosophical tyrant, a severe father, and a Scotsman. His tyranny was entirely well meant, his severity adapted to what he considered the loftiest ends, and his nationality swamped by convictions very different from those which belong generally to his race. Yet had it been given to any imaginative writer on a commonplace level to invent an intellectual Scot, it would have been a vulgarer Mill whom he would infallibly have set before the world. In his son's record, James Mill attains, as is not unnatural, an importance not elsewhere given to him, and, indeed, figures as almost more the inventor of Benthamism than Bentham himself. He was, at all events, one of the strongest and most able upholders and exponents of the Utilitarian philosophy. The master and the disciple diverged in later days from each other, in sympathy at least. Mill became independent of Bentham's help, and naturally his time was no longer his own when he entered

the India House and finally attained that independence: and other disciples arose who, perhaps, did not please the stern and exacting temper of one who felt himself the chief expositor of the veiled prophet; but the master never ceased to interest himself in the schemes of the disciple, nor the disciple to explain and reiterate the dogmas of the master. Bentham would seem to have shared even, to some extent, in what we have called the greatest production of Mill, the creation of the mind of his son. The following letter, written evidently in the view of some generous arrangement on the part of Bentham to promote the boy's interests in case of his father's death, has something touching in it. It was written before Mill had begun to see land, while he was yet in the midst of his difficulties, living with Bentham half the year and struggling through the remainder as he could. The child in question—strange little subject of so many philosophical experiments—was but six years old.

“I am not going to die, notwithstanding your zeal to come in for a legacy. However, if I were to die any time before this poor boy is a man, one of the things that would pinch me most sorely would be, the being obliged to leave his mind unmade to the degree of excellence of which I hope to make it. But another thing is that the only prospect which would lessen the pain would be leaving him in your hands. I therefore take your offer quite seriously . . . and then we may perhaps leave him a successor worthy of both of us.”

Many a parent has entertained similar hopes, and has been woefully disappointed. Mill was one of those happy enough to see all his hopes carried out. The result has been a spectacle to all the world, regarded by few with approval, by all with astonishment; but from his own point of view there can be no doubt that the philosopher-father secured a success far sweeter and more complete in this particular, than by his works either of philosophy or history, a success not made in pen and ink but in flesh and blood.

The names of Malthus and Ricardo have a right to a place in any record of philosophy, though scarcely in literature. They are little more entitled to be called writers than those who avail themselves of the arts of design, for the purpose of making mathematical diagrams, are to be known as artists. Literature is with them simply a vehicle for the conveyance of their theories to the world. Malthus was a well-born Englishman of the class of country gentry, and was educated at Cambridge, where he became a Fellow of Jesus College. He was a clergyman and held a cure in the Church for some time, but ended as a professor at Haileybury, where Mackintosh found him, and found in him a congenial soul when he accepted a similar appointment there. It is difficult to understand what caused the violent prejudice and obloquy with which his book upon population was received. 'A sort of madness seems to have affected his generation on this subject, as if it had been immoral to discountenance imprudent marriages, or to recommend to his countrymen the thought of ascertaining their own capacity to support a family before venturing upon the cares of one. Such sentiments are universally applauded in private, and why the public statement of them should have been attended by odium it is impossible to divine. Whether his calculations were altogether trustworthy is, of course, a totally different question. The works of Ricardo were entirely on Political Economy, works of the greatest importance in that science, but scarcely coming within our range as literature at all.

#### THE UTILITARIAN THEORY.<sup>1</sup>

The history of philosophy, in this age, is prominently that of one system only. Apart from the echoes of the

<sup>1</sup> By C. F. Oliphant.

Scotch school, in which Dugald Stewart, by his lectures, attracted listeners from far and near, its principal interest centres in one theory and, to a great extent, in one man. Stewart, in all probability the greatest philosopher of the age, did not, in spite of his ability, attain to the important position that was yielded, without opposition, to Jeremy Bentham. This man, contradicting everybody, arrogating to himself a higher place in the philosophical world than Aristotle or Bacon, attracted the attention of his time not more by the startling originality of his doctrines than by the imperious self-assertion with which he laid them down. Even so strong a mind as James Mill's came entirely under the mysterious subjugation, which seems to have been one of the chief powers of Bentham's intellect, and he treats the assaults made upon his master by Sir J. Mackintosh much in the same tone in which an earnest theologian would comment upon the published opinions of an avowed atheist upon matters of religion. The political controversies of the time are chiefly concerned with Bentham's new system; it forms the basis upon which Malthus built up his much discussed theories on population, and it is not too much to say that the history of the philosophy of the age is the history of Bentham and of utility. It is as the champion, or rather the inventor, of the utilitarian theory that Bentham claims for himself the highest place in the history of philosophy; it is in the same character that Mackintosh devotes all his powers to his annihilation, and it is again on the same ground that Mill takes up his defence against Mackintosh. The theory of utility is the only original philosophy of the period; the really more important school of the Scotch professors belongs properly to an earlier date, and Dugald Stewart, conspicuous as he was as an exponent and historian of philosophy, shone little as an original theorist, the doctrines which he laid before his delighted

classes being those which had been introduced by his master and predecessor in the chair which he occupied, Reid. Teaching no new truths, he was still unrivalled as an expositor of doctrines already set forward, and Mackintosh goes so far as to say of him that "without derogation from his writings, it might be said that *his disciples were among his best works*." But, even granting Stewart's supremacy as a teacher, as a theorist Bentham is undoubtedly the centre round which the philosophical activity of the period before us groups itself. The circumstances of the time were all in favour of the success of a new school: a state of affairs familiar enough to the ancients, but never satisfactorily treated, or even really appreciated by modern philosophers up to this time, now called for a return, more or less complete, to the tenets of the ancient masters. The impossibility of distinctly separating from each other the principles of moral and political science was one of the truths most apparent to the ancient philosophers. It was their favourite theory that there could be little difference between the principles upon which an individual ought to order his own life, and those upon which a legislator ought to order the affairs of the state or nation subject to him. Hence the two researches could be carried on side by side, and when we had once found out the highest rule of living, we might be fairly certain that we possessed also the guide to perfect legislation. But at the time when Bentham arose this principle had fallen into comparative neglect, and though for some time past the problems of legislative science had been brought prominently before the eyes of all thinking men by the events of a troubled period of history, and had been solved in ways more or less concordant with the generally received maxims of political philosophy, yet such problems still remained as isolated difficulties overcome by exceptional means, with-

out there being any clear perception of a general principle, applicable in every case, and showing the way out of all difficulties. Adam Smith, who preceded Bentham in the field of Political Economy, had confined his attention almost entirely to the sphere of that science, devoting himself to the practical difficulties connected with national wealth, but making no attempt to arrive at a general principle of political philosophy as a whole, legislative as well as economic. It was this general principle that Jeremy Bentham attempted to produce, and to find it he had to go back to the old connection between moral and political science. But though the idea with which he begins is an old one, he makes it his own at once by beginning, as it were, at the other end of the system. To Aristotle Ethics were a part of Politics, because a man could only be properly considered as a member of a community, and his happiness was a consequence of the happiness of the community to which he belonged. To Bentham, on the contrary, the individual is the chief consideration; to him "the community is a fictitious *body*, composed of the individual persons who are considered as constituting as it were its *members*. The interest of the community then is what?—the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it." In short, to the ancient philosopher the individual was nothing more than a member of the community; to the modern the community was nothing more than an assembly of individuals.

It was in this conception of the community and of its true interests that Bentham found the theory which made him so conspicuous a figure in his own age, and has raised him to such prominence in the general history of philosophy. If the community is to be considered as nothing more than a mass of individuals, then naturally the happiness of the greatest number of those individuals must occur to every one as the obvious synonym for the happi-

ness of the community, and the ultimate end to which all the actions of its members should tend. And with still stronger force it is apparent that if all moral actions should proceed from a desire to promote the happiness of the greatest number, legislation, which places the interests of the community in the first rank, should always be governed by the same principles of utility, and that no laws are good which do not tend directly or indirectly to produce the same effect. As an example we may instance the laws on usury which have been universal in all countries, by way of limiting the power of the rich lender over the poor borrower, and preventing what had been found to be one of the cruellest of individual wrongs. Bentham entirely disapproves of these laws, on the ground that every artificial means of controlling the operations of money and trammelling its circulation, is against the interests of the mass, always benefited by that circulation, however individuals may suffer. In this, as in every similar question, individual interests are to give way and individual wrongs to be accepted as a necessity, unpleasant indeed, but not sufficiently important to arrest the career of "Utility," the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Here, as in most of the purely theoretical parts of his system, it is difficult to deny that, as a principle of legislation, this sounds eminently reasonable.

In questions of moral science, however, his theory is open to opposition on one or two of those principal and ever open points of esoteric philosophy, the examination of which hardly comes within our present scope. It will be enough to state briefly that Bentham strongly espouses one side in the great controversy as to whether our actions are inspired by our reason or by something else; or, in the usual terms, whether the ultimate motive of moral action is something within ourselves or something external to ourselves. The theory of morals which he wishes to

establish fixes the ultimate motive as something which he calls pleasure, which determines our actions from without, while our reason only plays the ancillary part of elaborating the steps by which this end may be attained, without being any real authority upon the question of the desirability of its being attained. The two motives for moral actions laid down by this particular theory are the ideas of pleasures and pains; that is, the ultimate motive of action is the realisation of a pleasure or the avoidance of a pain. "Take away *pleasures* and *pains*," says Mr. Bentham, "and not only *happiness*, but *justice* and *duty*, and *obligation* and *virtue*, all which have been elaborately held up to view as independent of them, are so many empty sounds." A little later on, to prevent all doubt as to the thorough exclusion of reason in constituting these ends our motives for action, we have the further explanation, "It is no otherwise than through the *imagination* that any pleasure or any pain is capable of operating in the character of a *motive*." (In both the passages quoted, the italics are Bentham's.) This theory, which makes the motive an idea conceived by the imagination to which the reason guides our actions, has been called the Determinist theory, as determining our acts from without, and to this Bentham appears clearly to have given his adherence.

The word pleasure, too, brings Bentham again into the region of ethical controversy. Like all moral philosophers from Plato and Aristotle downwards, our modern theorist gets entangled in the attempt to make "pleasure" a chief point in his system of morality. His vague and speculative idea of pleasure, to be conceived apparently in the abstract, entirely apart from any conditions, can convey very little practical idea to the mind. It is a phantom as impossible to grasp as the most indefinite of the Platonic ideals. .



In political philosophy the points which he thinks of essential importance, are, to a great extent, identical with those subsequently demanded by the Charter. Universal suffrage he regards as indispensable, with the concomitant points of secret voting, annual parliaments, and the payment of members of the House of Commons. So far, these are the mere commonplaces of political philosophy; plans brought forward from time to time by theorists, and likely to be so brought forward again and again, until either they are accorded, or a decisive proof is given that their attainment is hopeless. But, save in one particular, these principles have not as yet gained favour in this country, notwithstanding the gradual enlargement of the franchise to an ever wider and farther-reaching sphere; the ballot, the sole particular in which his plan has been realised, is still on its trial, and does not seem to have carried out the hopes founded on it.

The real objection to Bentham's political philosophy is its universality; the theory of utility is essentially one which, if true anywhere, must be true everywhere, a characteristic useful, and even necessary to a sound theory of morals, but an important if not a fatal objection to a theory of political government. Every great problem that has yet arisen in this sphere has tended still further to enforce the truth that no universal theory of government can be laid down which will not have, in all its practical workings, to be modified according to the different customs and circumstances of different nations. These special circumstances may affect a theory in so many ways, as to the ease with which it can be introduced, the practical utility of its introduction, and the difficulties in the way of its execution, whether from already existing adverse prejudices, or a general want of respect for its provisions, as to make it impossible for any man to lay down an absolute rule for the government of a nation with anything

like the certainty which may be claimed for a similarly universal rule for the regulation of individual characters or actions.

Bentham's first published work, entitled *A Fragment on Government*, was nominally an examination of a passage in Blackstone's *Commentaries*, but the germs of all his subsequent theories are to be found in it. In this he first announces his zeal "for improvement in those shapes in which the lot of mankind is meliorated by it," and declares his indebtedness to a pamphlet of Priestley's, then recently published, for the phrase which had struck his mind so much, "the greatest happiness of the greatest number," the sentence which he afterwards made his motto. His subsequent publications include many pamphlets on the special political questions of the day, including the celebrated *Defence of Usury*, but the principal works by which his distinctive theory is illustrated are the *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Politics*, and the *Discourses on Civil and Penal Legislation*, published respectively in 1789 and in 1802.

Sir James Mackintosh has gained the name, enviable or unenviable, of the man who *should* have been the most important figure of the time, just as Bentham has the reputation of *being* the central figure. James Mill is perhaps the only philosophical writer who has failed, purposely perhaps as a disciple of Bentham, to acknowledge his pre-eminent merit. As a historian of the philosophy of the period immediately preceding his own, and that of which he formed a part, he has gained by his *Dissertation on the Progress of Ethical Philosophy* a reputation second to none. His general qualifications as a historian of philosophy may be well illustrated by the opinion of Sydney Smith, who says that "he had looked into every moral and metaphysical question from Plato to Paley." And it is less as an original theorist in either morals or

metaphysics than as a critic that he claims our attention. His own theory of the motive of moral action he derives to a great extent from the philosophers who preceded him; in fact he says himself that Dr. Butler's three first sermons are the real source of all his moral philosophy. The importance of the moral sentiments is the chief ground upon which he works, though his sympathy with Hartley's principles of association makes him develop them into the ultimate motive power which he calls conscience. The point about him, however, that we have most to regard at present is that he was one of the few men of his time who emphatically declined to accept Bentham's estimate of his own importance in the sphere of philosophy, and declared to the world which he had enslaved that his theories were based upon unsound foundations, expounded in unintelligible terms, and capable of no sort of practical application. The phraseology in which Bentham has chosen to set his theories before the world must have struck everyone who has even dipped into his writings. Not only does his wish to take in strict order all the notions contingent upon the idea which he may chance to be enunciating lead him into the confusion of endless parenthetical sentences, but his dissatisfaction with the usual phrases of moral philosophy then familiar to the popular mind tends to make his utterances difficult of comprehension. To take one instance among many, there is probably no phrase more familiar to everybody than that we do a thing because we *ought* to do it: to this mode of expression Bentham has an insuperable objection, and suggests that whenever the word "ought" is used we should retort "why?" The answer to this last question would, of course, from his point of view, be because it tends to the general happiness, but it is difficult to think that this sort of phraseology can be as intelligible, and consequently as useful in practical crises as that which is

more familiar to us. Mackintosh's vehement objections to Bentham's theories are chiefly founded upon one great charge, well enough known to all who have gone at all seriously into the abstruse discussions of the different modern theorists in the realms of moral philosophy. He accuses Bentham of having made the inexcusable mistake of confounding the *Theory of Actions* with the *Theory of Sentiments*, or, in other words, of making no distinction between the mental process which precedes and originates moral actions, and the standard or criterion by reference to which we approve or condemn such actions. There is no doubt that in most of the systems of moral philosophy with which we are acquainted these two points are invariably kept distinct and separate; in fact, there is perhaps no principle, save that of Utility as understood by Bentham, which could combine the two in the way that he does. But it seems to be a mistake to charge Bentham with making a blunder in this. The explanation which suggests itself is that Mackintosh did not perceive that this confusion of two distinct ideas was not the blunder that he considers it, but was intentional on the part of Bentham, and that the theory originally designed to bring under one head the problems of moral and political philosophy, was equally framed with a view to simplify the difficulties of the former by bringing to one main test those of both its branches, and making the origin of our moral actions itself the criterion by which our approbation of them is to be regulated. Sir James's objections, in short, may fairly be deemed arguments, and to our mind most cogent arguments, against Bentham's system; but we cannot for a moment conceive that Bentham made the confusion alluded to otherwise than purposely. It is from its effect, intended or accomplished as it may be, in unifying or bringing under one head a vast number of different questions that the principle of Utility derives its chief import-

ance. That its tendency to increase the general happiness is an element, and a considerable element, in the goodness of an action, no one could venture to deny, but Sir James Mackintosh, with the bulk of modern philosophers, while acknowledging this, yet made the distinction that, while the idea is inseparable from our notion of moral approbation, it is entirely and easily to be distinguished from the sources of our moral action. To Mackintosh the supreme sanction, which with him comes to the same thing as the ultimate general motive of our actions, is the authority and influence of conscience, which he separates from reason. The chief opposition that he seems to fear is that of the school who term all appetites and all affections the result of "self-love," and, taking this term as his text, he proves that self-love can be, and probably is, absent from the state of mind from which benevolent actions emanate, and that even the appetites which might fairly be deemed selfish may be entirely independent of the supposed supremacy of "self-love." Mackintosh's theory is really more akin to the old, and even then exploded, theory of sympathy than to any other system before him, but his adoption of the ultimate sanction of conscience keeps us still in the difficult position of having nothing tangible, nothing about the meaning of which all men are agreed, to go by. The indefiniteness (practically) of his own system is not much less than that of the ideas against which he is striving.

So strenuous an opponent of Bentham's theories could not but find a severe antagonist in James Mill. Himself a moral philosopher of no mean eminence, he can scarcely find any heavier charge against Mackintosh than that he condemned and even scoffed at Bentham. His first remark upon the connection sufficiently illustrates the tone of his subsequent observations: "Sir James has made the most perfect exhibition of himself in the article on

Mr. Bentham." He goes on, in the same spirit, to remark that Mackintosh's language proves him "to have been a man who, in speaking of others, to serve a purpose, little minded whether he was speaking correctly or incorrectly." Not even the most ardent admirer of Bentham's theories could call this a fair way of commencing a review of any criticism of any philosophical system. Mill's remarks on Mackintosh are throughout rather unfair, but the *Fragment* cannot be fairly estimated unless we attempt, which is not our task at present, a thorough review of the works of the man whom it condemns. Why Mr. Mill should have chosen for refutation the statements that Bentham and his followers "braved vulgar prejudices," and that in their phraseology and otherwise they "sought distinction by singularity," it is difficult to guess, unless it means, that, as a horse-dealer is always most eloquent in praise of the worst points of the animal which he is selling, so Mill lends his support to Bentham against the accusations which he knows to be truest.

James Mill's chief work is the *Analysis of the Human Mind*, in which he does his best to make an enlargement and illustration of Bentham's theories into an original work. His first step is the division of our states of consciousness into *sensations*, *i.e.* the class of feeling "which exists when the object of sense is present," and *ideas*, *i.e.* "that which exists after the object of sense has ceased to be present." After careful analysis of these two heads, ~~and~~ a dissertation upon language and nomenclature, in which ~~we~~ find most probably the source of the stress laid by his son upon the importance of thoroughly appreciating the exact signification of words in the study of Logic, Mill proceeds to condemn the ideas previously held about consciousness and conception, which had been called "powers of the mind," an expression which, after the perusal of all Mill's arguments, still appears more expressive than the

phrase of "states of the mind" which he wishes to substitute for it. The only point in which Mill goes a little beyond his master is in his extended use of the principle of association; like Bentham, he separates sensations into pleasurable and painful sensations, but the theory of the association which forms many individual ideas, first into one complex idea, and subsequently into a generality, goes rather further than Bentham chose to venture. But this generality it is hard to realise, for "when an idea becomes to a certain degree complex, from the multiplicity of ideas it comprehends, it is of necessity indistinct." General ideas, such as, for instance, the idea of "man," which Mill himself selects, are, according to his theory, only to be acquired by the association, or, so far as we can gather, the agglomeration of individual ideas, and even then must be to a certain extent vague and indefinite.

Besides the *Analysis of the Human Mind*, and the *Fragment on Mackintosh*, which, though we have treated it first, was the last of Mill's philosophical works, he published nothing in philosophical literature worthy of notice except the *Elements of Political Economy*, which is no more than Bentham without his cumbrous phraseology.

The mention of Political Economy in this age, brings before us the name of a much-abused man, Mr. Malthus. In the one branch of the science to which he devoted himself, he may be said almost to have created a new school, and *Malthus on Population* will be quoted as an authority, whether with favour or disfavour, so long as this particular branch of Political Economy continues to occupy the minds of theorists. On general points, though a great deal of his attention is devoted to details, the subject of his work may be described as the ratio of the population of a country to the food which the land can produce for their support. It must be remembered that

Malthus wrote in an age of Protection, and that the prevailing idea of the time was that the population of a country was to be fed by the produce of that country; and, things being as they were, it was a somewhat alarming revelation when he proved that, whereas the population tended to increase in a geometrical ratio as 1, 2, 4, 8, etc., the food-producing capabilities of the land could only be made to increase in an arithmetical ratio, as 1, 2, 3, 4, etc. This being so, the writer's attention was naturally directed to the possible checks on the increase of the population, and it is for this that his name has been held up by pseudo-philanthropists to the abuse of the easily-led portion of mankind, as a man devoid of sympathy towards the poorer classes, a cold-blooded statistician with an utter disregard of the feelings of the people about whom he writes. As well might a doctor, who prescribes unpleasant medicines, be called hard-hearted; all that Malthus does is to point out the fact that an evil exists, and that there are remedies, some always present and always working, and some which, in contradiction of those which do exist and should not, should exist, and might exist, but as a rule, do not. Some of the checks to population may perhaps be taken as being between these two extremes, such as utter destitution, compulsory military service, the prevalence of epidemic disease or any similar cause; but apart from such more or less exceptional checks, Malthus divides his remedies into these two classes—firstly, preventive, meaning such as are instituted by the action of reason and prudence, such as the avoidance of marriage without the prospect of being able to sustain a family; and secondly, positive, by which he implies such checks as rise unavoidably from the laws of nature, and which he classes as misery, under which head comes the utter destitution mentioned above, with the addition of severe labour, unwholesome occupations, bad



nursing, or undue exposure to the weather. All forms of vice too are positive checks, but these are of the kind which have to be taken into consideration only because they exist, and the continuance of which the most ardent opponent of the excessive increase of population cannot wish. If, upon these principles, Malthus is to be criticised in such terms as everyone must have heard used about him, it is difficult to know what social system can be so framed as to escape censure.

Malthus published one essay upon the *Principles of Population* before he gave to the world the work upon which his reputation is founded. Among many treatises upon the different points of Political Economy raised in his time, an *Inquiry into the Nature and Progress of Rent, and the Principles by which it is Regulated*, published in 1815, is perhaps the most important.

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HENRY HALLAM, born 1798 ; died 1859.

Published *View of the State of Europe during the Middle Ages*, 1818.

*Constitutional History of England*, 1827.

*Introduction to the Literature of Europe in the 15th, 16th, and 17th Centuries*, 1837-39.

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JOHN LINGARD, born 1771 ; died 1851

Published *Catholic Loyalty Vindicated*, 1805.

*Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 1809.

*History of England from the first Roman Invasion to the Accession of William and Mary*, 1819-1830.

And many polemical pamphlets.

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THOMAS M'CRIE, born 1772 ; died 1835.

Published *Life of John Knox*, 1812.

*Life of Andrew Melville*, 1819.

*Suppression of the Reformation in Spain*, 1829.

JEREMY BENTHAM, born 1747 ; died 1832.

Published *A Fragment on Government*, 1776.

*View of the Hard Labour Bill*, 1778.

*Principles of Morals and Legislation*, 1780.

*Defence of Usury*, 1787.

*A Plea for the Constitution*, 1803.

*Scotch Reform Considered*, 1808.

*Elements of the Art of Packing*, 1810.

With many other works on political and economical science.

His chief works were reproduced in French by Dumont.

*Traité de Législation Civile et Pénale*, 1802.

*Théorie des Peines et des Recompences*, 1802.

SIR JAMES MACKINTOSH, born 1765 ; died 1832.

Published *Vindiciæ Gallicæ*, 1791.

*Introductory Discourse to Lectures on Law*, 1799.

*Dissertation on Ethical Philosophy*, 1831.

(in *Encyclopædia Britannica*) separately, 1836.

*History of England*, 1830-31.

*Fragment on Causes of Revolution of 1688*, 1834.

*Life of Sir Thomas More*.

JAMES MILL, born 1773 ; died 1836.

Published *History of India*, 1818.

*Elements of Political Economy*, 1821.

*Analysis of the Human Mind*, 1829.

*Fragment on Mackintosh*, 1835.

With many lesser works on political subjects, and contributions to reviews and other periodicals.

Rev. THOMAS ROBERT MALTHUS, born 1766 ; died 1834.

Published *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 1798.

enlarged in 2d edition, 1803.

*An Inquiry into the Nature and Progress of Rent*, 1815.

*Principles of Political Economy*, 1820.

With smaller works on Political Questions, the Corn Laws,

Poor Laws, etc.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THEOLOGIANS.

It is hardly possible to reckon so important a name as that of Paley as belonging to the period within which we are limited. It is true that his last publication, and one of his most important, came before the world only in 1802, but neither in his life nor his work was there any variety from the moderate religiousness and scientific dignified apologetics of the eighteenth century, to which he belonged. His first publication on Moral Philosophy appeared to some of Bentham's friends to be likely to "take the wind out of the sails" of the Utilitarian system, and alarmed them momentarily, eliciting from the philosopher himself a half cry of panic. But this alarm seems to have been without foundation. Paley's works, whether judiciously or not we need not pause to inquire, are still text-books at the universities, but the scepticism against which he sets his forces in array was not of the kind to which we are now accustomed, which takes much of the force from his defence. They are still however eminently readable in a merely literary point of view, and extracts might be made, in which the reader would find *much happiness of expression and force of illustration, without any of the disadvantages of antiquated polemics.* Dr. Watson, the Bishop of Llandaff, who lived for some time, almost a neighbour of the poets, on the edge of the

Lake country, and in his day too defended Christianity, without perhaps any very warm enthusiasm for it, requires mention at least. Godwin dedicated to him a volume of the sermons which he had preached in the earlier part of his career, which was, perhaps, but a doubtful compliment to his orthodoxy. Dr. Horsley Bishop of St. Asaph, Dr. Beilby Porteus Bishop of London, and Dr. Marsh Bishop of Peterborough, can scarcely be said to exist save to students of the most dusty shelves in theological libraries. Dr. Hartwell Horne, the author of the *Introduction to the Study of the Scriptures*, is better known and holds a more living place: but even he still lingered in the eighteenth century, and cannot be called a man of his time.

It is not, however, in detached names or treatises that we find the special religious interest of the age, but in the predominating Evangelical party then in full zenith of its power in England, first in all great and good works, and attaching to itself not only the most devout but the most benevolent and philanthropic spirits of the age. The men who with the hard labour of twenty years won from England the abolition of slavery—a step which cost so much in actual expenditure, and by which the nation ventured nobly upon a great sacrifice and effort for abstract right with doubtful results—belonged, without exception, to this straitest of religious communities. These men can scarcely be said to belong to the history of literature, but they all dabbled in composition more or less, pouring forth pamphlets, speeches, pleas of every kind, masses of evidence, and appeals full of the eloquence at least of sincerity, and glowing earnestness and zeal. Among these guides and leaders, however, were some whose gift of speech was indisputable, and who have left behind them volumes of sermons and essays and church histories which have supplied reading for thousands of devout persons, and have been considered by their readers

as something almost divine—as far superior to the less sacred array of books, as heaven is to earth : for the finest poetry, the highest philosophy, is not read by half so extended an audience, or regarded with half the admiration which a popular book of sermons will call forth. To a great mass of our countrymen, even now, such productions embody all that is known of literature.

Still more was this the case in the beginning of the century, when books were neither so cheap nor so plentiful as now ; and when the Evangelicals were at the height of their power. We doubt much whether any extended religious movement can ever exist, especially among the millions, which is not strongly leavened with those views which are identified with the Low Church party. The claims of Church and priesthood do not touch the heart of the populace, and we doubt greatly whether all the splendour of a restored ritual would ever have the same effect upon the English crowd as the homely excitement of a prayer-meeting, or the emotional preaching of one who acknowledges himself to have been the greatest of sinners. In the time of which we treat, the zeal of Evangelical religiousness was penetrating among the wealthy, as it had already become supreme in the lower classes. It was the time when the "Clapham Sect" was at its height, when Simeon at Cambridge was proselytising with all his might, and sending forth, in all the warmth of a propaganda, the young men whom he converted ; when Isaac Milner, Dean of Carlisle, a large and jovial figure full of genial force and breadth, of life, recommended the self-denying doctrines of modern Puritanism by the warmth of his *bonhomie* and enjoyment of that existence which he fervently believed to be a perpetual struggle against the world and sin ; when Wilberforce wrote his *Practical View*, and prayed and fought, and talked and jested, with the same mixture of oppressive

doctrine and gay spirits; when brilliant parties ended with exposition and prayer, and society itself was almost persuaded in the midst of corruption and license to be converted too. Religious life has rarely gone through a more remarkable phase. It was to break up after a time, and give way to the germ of reawakening Catholicism and the attractions of tradition in the Church of England: and in a less important, yet scarcely less interesting way to find an outlet, bursting its husks, and pressing into a higher air of enthusiasm, in the movement of new zeal and high-toned spiritual life, which has been connected with the name of Edward Irving. But, in the meantime, the Evangelical party was supreme, doing all the good that was being done, aiming at every benevolent enterprise and effort of salvation that came within its reach, seeking freedom for men's bodies and for their souls, and believing that it had found a way by prayer and preaching, and the glow of social piety, to reconcile the Church and the world.

The incongruous point which has always cast a certain air of unreality upon a society so truly pious and full of good deeds and great effort, is the contrast between the ascetic side of Christianity—the self-denial which was the chief of virtues, the injunctions to come out of the world and be separate, the denunciation of worldly pleasures and gaieties which were its dogmatic utterance—and the extremely prosperous, luxurious, and enjoyable life of the leaders of this religious party. When such doctrines are preached by apostles who go out scrippless and shoeless, with their lives in their hands: when they are put forth by ascetics worn with toil and fasting, by men whose self-abnegation is evident, whose life has no solace but God's service, of whom we can even feel, with a high sense of fitness, that they have served God for naught and depart to their recompense in another world, having had none in this

—there is nothing that jars upon our feeling of harmony and appropriateness. But when the same sentiments are preached by the happy and wealthy, men with all the enjoyments of life about them, sitting at luxurious tables, surrounded by happy families, successful in everything, moving in a circle of admiration and love and praise, yet bidding us all the time to come out of Babylon, to love not the world, to regard life as a struggle and this earth as a vale of tears, there is at the best an inappropriateness in the preaching, which, certain as we are of the sincerity of the preachers, perplexes the sympathetic and brings a laugh from the cynic. The picture of the Clapham Sect living in those luxurious villas, with everything that wealth could command, in a pleasant commotion of congenial society, hushed and sanctified by the prayer-meeting, but still full of amusing talk, of delicate flattery, of the very atmosphere of pleasure, is as bright as any picture of society could be, but it does not harmonise well with the tenets of world-renunciation and self-denial. There is no reason why they should not have been happy and enjoyed themselves,—neither was there any reason why Henry Martyn, the devoted missionary, should not have had twelve hundred a year from the Indian government. Nothing can take away from the certainty of his real devotion, his almost martyrdom, “yet the ideal would be better without” that comfortable income, as Sir James Stephen says. And so we feel that the ideal of a Church militant, of a band who in the world are to have tribulation, and who were eager in claiming for themselves all the characteristics of those who were desired in their utter humiliation and poverty to take no thought for the morrow, would have been better had they been less rich, less happily off, less safe from all the assaults of fate.

This, however, though it explains the secret sentiment, not strong enough to be called suspicion, with which this

party has always been regarded, the imagination being instinctively displeased by their luxurious wellbeing, is at the best a fanciful objection. And it is better to indicate who they were and what their connection with literature, than to discuss the curious intricacies of nature which make it possible to combine the precepts of asceticism with all the comforts of life, and yet be perfectly sincere both in the profession of the one and the enjoyment of the other. Of William Wilberforce, and of his work and character, everybody knows something. He was the most remarkable and distinguished of the four indefatigable champions whose untiring exertions procured the abolition of slavery—which is fame enough for a man. For twenty years, in season and out of season, he urged upon the country and upon Parliament the horrors of slavery, the shame and sin to a free and Christian people of holding slaves. It has happened on several occasions since then, and notably in our own day, that England has done a thing which cost her a great deal both in purse and feeling, and of the advantage of which nobody was quite convinced, because it was right. The abolition of slavery was one of these. It ruined one of our wealthiest dependencies, it took a great deal of money out of the national pocket, it has not turned out all that hope suggested it might; but, nevertheless, it is a thing which it is impossible to regret, as it was a thing impossible to refuse: and to Wilberforce and his associates, Thomas Clarkson, Zachary Macaulay, and Grenville Sharp, belongs the immortal credit of having convinced and persuaded the national mind that it was impossible. Before he had entered upon this warfare, however, when a young man just leaving college, gay, witty, wealthy, with all the world before him, and no disinclination towards its pleasures, Wilberforce had become a member of the party with which all his life was henceforward associated. The religious



teachings which had guided his childhood had been thrown off in the freedom and turmoil of youth, but he was still a young man at the opening of his career when these severe and absorbing doctrines became the deliberate choice of his excellent intellect and fervent heart. The piety of his early home had been inspired by Whitfield, and the wave of religious revival of which he was one of the chief agents; but the fervent religious feeling of Wilberforce was of a different type from that which went out into the highways and hedgerows to compel the poor and neglected to come in. His was not the fashion of mind which naturally seeks the brotherhood of the poor, or yearns over the ignorant masses. There was another work to be done in England, a work which should supplement and complete the work of Whitfield and Wesley. It had been the common people who had heard them gladly, as their prototypes in Judea heard a greater than they. But the other half of the world—the educated, the well-off, the people to whom no missionary or evangelist got access, whom the wandering preacher at the street corner moved only to contempt or resentment, by what means were they to be reached?

Wilberforce's sympathies were all among this higher class. He was as fond of society as he had been before his conversion. An active member of Parliament, a man in full intercourse with the world, and amid all the excitements of public life, street-preaching or personal effort among the miners or the cotton-spinners would have been entirely out of his way; but he could speak to the people about him with at once a warm brotherly sympathy and the authority of one who had made religion his chief object, without relinquishing anything that was really good in life. His ardent mind was full of the desire to do something, to say his say for the sacred cause which he had espoused with all his faculties; and it was this

desire and not any literary impulse which produced the *Practical View*, which is his only connection with literature, and the sole permanent utterance of his life. It had been "for several years the earnest wish of the writer of the following pages to address his countrymen on the important subject of religion," he says in his preface to his book. The form it took was that of a contrast between the prevailing "Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in this country," and "Real Christianity;" and the persons he addressed were men such as those whom St. Paul addressed on Mars' Hill, but whom few preachers were bold enough to summon to the bar, with the same unhesitating plainness with which they arraigned their humbler neighbours. Wilberforce did not appeal to infidels or unbelievers. He made no assault upon scepticism. His object was to show the respectable and intelligent how far their calm and easy ignoring of religion, even while professing it, was unlike the spirit of Christianity. There is no special charm of style to redeem his treatise from the respectful oblivion into which—after a popularity greater in degree than that which almost any other kind of literary production enjoys in its day—religious books are apt to fall. And nothing can be more unlike the works which have gained something of a similar influence in our own time. It is to be feared that to Wilberforce that, broad and conciliatory treatment which translates the time-worn language of Christianity into the phraseology of its philosophical opponents, by way of betraying these latter tenderly into something like faith, or approval at least—would have appeared flat blasphemy. He would have had no understanding of the process which turns the love of Christ into the Enthusiasm of Humanity. The society which he addressed was not one which required such methods. It was as much Christian as orthodoxy re-

quired, and could be made to demonstrate its zeal for religion "by mentioning the name of some acknowledged heretic." What made the heart of the good man burn within him was to see how completely it could ignore the creed it held, and how the truths, that were to him vital, had got mossed over and practically obliterated by spiritual apathy and the calm of habit. The insidious idea that it did not much matter what a man believed, so long as he did believe sincerely, and lived a life in accordance with his principles, was to him a poison terrible to contemplate. "With such transcendent means of knowing the way which leads to life, what plea can we have to urge in our defence if we remain willingly and obstinately ignorant?" he asks. No doubt as to the certainty of the means of acquiring that knowledge had entered his mind, nor was it necessary to take into consideration such doubts in his audience. That they suffered the light to grow dim, or preferred to enjoy a distant glimmer from its general illumination, rather than to rejoice in the particular glory of a radiance which pervaded and revealed every corner of the soul, was his complaint. It is the universal complaint of the preacher in all generations, even in the very bosom of the Church itself; but it is not on religious indifference only, or neglect of the "transcendent means of knowing," that a religious writer of the importance of Wilberforce would be likely to address society now.

He had, however, the fullest hearing in his own day. The public, to whom his book was addressed, received ~~and~~ read it with devotion. In six months almost as many editions were called for, and 7500 copies sold; and from the time of its publication in the end of last century—1797—until quite recent days, it has gone on in periodical reproduction, commending itself still, it is to be supposed, to devout souls, though no longer perhaps to the higher classes, the educated part of the community, to whom it

was at first addressed. Almost all the other publications of Wilberforce were on questions connected with slavery, and therefore of temporary application; so that his connection with literature is solely through this book. If it is not, perhaps one of those proverbial books which no gentleman's library can be without, there is yet scarcely a household collection of any permanence in which a copy will not be found.

Wilberforce himself is one of the most attractive and delightful figures of his time, commending his religious views even more powerfully by the personal charm of a character so genial, buoyant, and sweet, than by his writings. When the Abolition Bill was passed in 1807, and Sir Samuel Romilly, in his speech in Parliament, referred to the individual member who, after the exertions of twenty years, thus saw his long labours crowned with success, "the whole house, surprised into forgetfulness of its usual habits, burst forth into acclamations of applause," a tribute of approbation "such as was rarely ever before given," says Bishop Porteous, "to any man sitting in his place in either house of Parliament."

Dean Milner, who is said to have been the active instrument of Wilberforce's entrance into the Evangelical party, and who was himself one of its leaders, is chiefly known as part author of the *History of the Church*, which his brother Joseph Milner originated and partially executed, a book superseded now and of little authority, which Sir James Stephen shoots a fatal bolt at, by informing us that though it has "been extolled as containing the most comprehensive and authentic account of the Reformation in Germany and of the character of the great German reformer," neither of the authors "ever had seen, or would have been able to read, one line of the many volumes written by Luther in his mother tongue, and even yet untranslated into any other," a statement which throws a

curious light upon the shortcomings of historical investigation at that time. It is unnecessary to discuss a book belonging in reality to an earlier period, before the science of history had become what it now is, and while German was still a barbarous language unrevealed to the world, without even the little taper of the Norwich critic and philosopher William Taylor, much less the poetic torch of Coleridge, to throw light upon it. Dean Milner was, however, a personage so notable, as to demand a regard wherever he passes. There is something in him of Samuel Johnson, but in a far more genial interpretation; and something of Dr. Whewell, but without his science, a large and influential personality, which is independent of anything actually done or even said by the possessor of it. Laden with honours and successes, always popular, always prosperous, a courted and flattered member of the best society wherever he went, it is extremely difficult to realise that he too was at the head of the party vulgarly called the Saints, the preachers of world-renunciation and self-denial. The combination is one of the most curious in history.

Another leader of this party whose position demands observation was Charles Simeon, whose life and work was at Cambridge, and whose influence upon the young men who in so many successive generations passed through his sphere was as great as that which in an after period attended the work of Newman in Oxford—as great, but of a kind as different as could well be conceived. That he should have numbered among the youths whom he ~~led~~ into the evangelist's office the name of Henry Martyn is almost distinction enough for an apostolic teacher, but his work of this kind was greater and more pervasive than that of any other of the modern fathers of the Church. Not only did he draw the youth of the University into his fold, and mould with his own hands, so, to speak, the young clergy who made the Evangelical party so

important, and, for a time, secured to the Low Church the chief influence in religion and religious life—but he prepared for his disciples a system of instruction and suggestion, which, if human nature were capable of such bondage, would have kept them within the very print of his footsteps for generations: and after his death employed his fortune in the purchase of benefices, in order to secure the appointment of men according to his own heart. It would be, however, ungenerous to use these words, did they imply any intention of self-glorification in Simeon's mind. It was the service and love of Christ which he inculcated, not any discipleship of his own. "His whole life was but one long labour of love," says Stephen. "Slowly, painfully, but with unfaltering hopes, he toiled through more than fifty successive years in the same narrow chamber, and among the same humble congregation, requited by no emolument, stimulated by no animating occurrences, and unrewarded, until the near approach of old age, by the gratitude or cordial respect of the society amidst which he lived." It is not necessary to enter here, where he has so very slight a standing ground, into the strange levities of manner, of which Sir James Stephen gives a graphic description, and which hindered the progress of a man whose influence at last became so powerful: for nothing could be slighter than the connection of Simeon with literature, or, at the same time, more quaint and out of the way. His first publication was a treatise on the composition of sermons, and his works—one of the most strange contributions ever made to literature—consist of a series of collections of skeleton sermons, intended for the benefit and guidance of his converts and disciples, amounting in all, we are told, to 2536 discourses! They are described as "peculiarly adapted to assist the studies of the young clergy in their preparations for the pulpit," and, no doubt, were intended

to keep in the strait way of orthodoxy so many intelligences which might have strayed to one side or the other. It was Simeon's habit, in his own preaching, to avail himself of this little piece of machinery, which he enlarged from his private meditation, or the impressions made upon his mind at the moment of delivery. It is natural that a teacher should think the system which suits himself good for his pupils, but there must have been great rigidity, as well as simplicity, in the mind which thus furnished leading strings for an entire generation. It is a vulgar test of excellence, but yet a most curious sign of the times, that Simeon received for this curious collection of intellectual anatomical studies the great sum of £5000, which he forthwith distributed among missionary societies. His own patrimony sufficed to purchase the advowsons of fifty parishes, by which, we presume, the Simeon trustees endeavour still to keep a germ of the old Evangelical party, so long since driven from the foreground of the national life, within the bosom of the Church.

It was not, however, in the Church of England that the literature of the pulpit attained its highest development. We have to turn to a small sect, the most rigid of the many Nonconformist subdivisions of the faith, to find the really great preacher whose name ranks with the highest in England, and almost on a level with the great preachers of France. The noble energy and eloquence of Robert Hall seem neither to have suffered from the premature development of an infant prodigy nor the too early success of youth, through both of which stages he passed. He was of the strictest sect of the Pharisees, a Baptist, and a devout one, neither breaking the bonds of his communion, nor in any way unfaithful to its limitations—yet full of the natural frankness and liberality of a great mind. He was one of the men whose personality makes a distinct mark upon their age, and

touches the most diverse intelligences with a sense of fervid sincerity, truth, and genius. His praise comes to us from all quarters, from the most unlikely voices. Not only his co-religionists, or the kindred party in the Church, or the sympathetic critics in Scotland who judged English dissent at all times with less prejudice than their contemporaries elsewhere, but even from the midst of those to whom a Dissenter was as poison, the same testimony breaks forth. Dr. Parr, in his Spital Sermon, the *Quarterly Review*, Lord Brougham, who ranks him near Massillon, Lord Lytton in his novels—who adjures his reader to “send for Robert Hall! It is the life of a man that is good to mankind itself to contemplate,”—all men are of one mind where he is concerned. It is scarcely possible, however, to set him in the history of literature in a place at all proportioned to that which he occupied in his generation. The sermons which live, save in the humble habitual reading of those classes of the community who read sermons for duty and not with any critical perception—are very few: and Robert Hall’s style is of a more formal description—in print—than that of the orators who have outlived their day. But the appreciation of those who heard and knew him was so thorough and enthusiastic, that its warmth still lingers with a genial glow about his name. The fire and fervour of him give a certain radiance of life to his narrow community and rigid creed. He was uncompromising in his condemnation of all that he thought irreligious, or contrary to the teachings of Christianity. There is a curious little encounter of arms between him and the well-known Crabb Robinson, in the early years of that friendly commentator on literature—against whom Hall had opposed all his influence, in consequence of the youth’s adoption of the principles of Godwin’s *Political Justice*. But the frankness of the young free-thinker, who wrote to him pro-



testing against such treatment, called forth a reply, so "prompt and respectful," that injury was forgotten in admiration. He was not to be beguiled by the dazzling of a great literary reputation from instant hostility to everything that savoured of unbelief; but yet he ventured to write and speak boldly in favour of freedom of the press, and was, so long as that was possible, a champion of France in her great struggle, and a strenuous opponent of the "impious war" in which England had joined against that representative of freedom.

Hall was partially brought up at the University of Aberdeen, and while he was there lived on terms of the closest brotherhood, as has been already told, with James Mackintosh. They were entirely unlike each other, but never ceased to be warm friends. Hall, like his brother-in-arms, modified, if he did not change, his sentiments, as most of the early sympathisers with the French were compelled to do. He was always liberal, with the somewhat polemical tendency of his class, launching against Pitt the fiercest diatribes; although when necessity came he did his best to reanimate national feeling, and in milder times his wail for the national calamity of the death of the Princess Charlotte was almost lyrical. Part of his life was spent at Cambridge, where the preaching of the eminent Nonconformist stirred even the classical calm of the University, though we cannot call to mind in what way, or if at all, Simeon and he, both holding similar views, and labouring with the same end, came in contact with each other. His great exertions, however, in a sphere so important, disturbed the balance of his intellect, and the great preacher twice had an attack of insanity, which it is evident came less from any predisposition that way, than from the strain of exciting oratory which moved himself as much as his hearers, and the restless and continued work which accompanied it. He was all

his life subject to attacks of excruciating pain, against which he struggled with the noblest fortitude, refusing any exemption from the claims of life on account of these tortures, and rising in a moment, on the cessation of the pain, which had made him roll on the ground in agony, into instant resumption of his work, or of the conversation in which he had been interrupted: altogether a man of noble mettle, and the most dauntless heroic nature.

It was in Scotland, however, that the highest example of the religious writer and orator, the Christian philosopher and statesman (for such in his way was Chalmers, in addition to his other gifts), was to be found. A generation later than the Low Church leaders, and the great Dissenter, Thomas Chalmers, was born when they were beginning the work of their lives, at a time when Scotland was as apathetic in the matter of religion as England, with a touch of ruder scepticism and joviality, but, notwithstanding her invariable theological tendencies, no greater earnestness or devotion — nay, rather less than more, for she had not been stirred by such an outburst of spiritual life as that which Whitfield and Wesley had called forth. The New Light, the attempts at evangelical revival, at which Burns had jeered, though backed by a profound but silent sympathy in the inner heart of the nation, had been laughed down so far as that was possible, and, surrounded by many unlovely circumstances, such as those of the Holy Fair, had repelled the more highly educated classes still more than the popular piety had done in England; while at the same time the humorous faculty of the nation had seized upon its own aspect of indifference, and with the double meaning which the popular intellect loves, had fixed the epithet of Moderate upon the easy-going and too tolerant Church, with a satirical mingling of ridicule and approval. Chalmers began life in the contented composure of this “Moderate” religion, holding a mathematical

lectureship along with his cure of souls, with more interest in the former than the latter. But in the quiet of his north-country parish other thoughts soon arose; and, as he himself describes, other magnitudes became apparent to him, the depths and problems of human life, the greatness of eternity. This new impulse soon made itself known, and the changed voice in which the minister of Kilmeny addressed his humble flock reached to the larger Scotland, which even then was ever open to the mental stimulant of preaching. He was soon (in 1815, being then thirty-six) called from his country parish to Glasgow, whither he went in all the vigour of manhood and force of his genius. Here the pulpit of St. John's soon became a centre of influence, and the great commercial community about him had to stop its multifarious wheels and arrest its endless activity to listen to the rolling sentences of a somewhat laboured but always fervent eloquence, full of high thoughts and moral elevation, and instinct with that incommunicable magic of true oratory against which nothing but the obtuse can stand unmoved—and big Glasgow, noisy and self-important, has never been obtuse. It was here that Chalmers's most remarkable productions were brought forth—the *Astronomical Discourses* and those called *Commercial*, addressed to the men in trade who were his spiritual charge—with many more. The first of these series is perhaps the one most adapted at this distance to show the reader what manner of preacher he was. There is an oratorical fulness and repetition of phrases in them which is sometimes wearisome to the eye in reading, but which no doubt increased the effect in utterance as they rolled forth impetuous and strong, rising from the moderation of the beginning to a climax of fine indignation or moving tenderness. He “buried his adversaries under the fragments of heaving mountains,” Jeffrey said. But as he reasons of the gran-

deur and greatness of nature, all founded on the endless variety of Divine invention, pervaded by endless Divine care and forethought; or turns to confound the sceptic, who scoffed, amid a world so vast as that of the starry system, at the human conceit which supposed mankind to be the first object of God's care, by directing him to a drop of water in a microscope, the infinitely small beside the infinitely great; or discourses upon Newton and the modesty of true science (which, perhaps, had he lived to our day, in which science is regnant, he might have been less certain of), there is throughout a largeness of conception, a breadth and elevation of thought in the preacher's views, which is worthy of his subject. The reader cannot but feel that the heavy clouds that hang over that great damp smoky town must have lifted, the atmosphere cleared, the horizon widened out, as the multitude sat and listened. A large magnanimity and greatness, as of a bigger world, is in the strain; and when he points out the great conflict of spiritual forces that had arisen in the immense unknown universe over the inhabitants of this globe, and suggests the interest of myriads of beings more great than we in the problems which it is for us to work out, and reminds his hearers that all our history is but a chapter in the measureless eternity of God, no more in His divine life than a passing incident in ours—we can well conceive how the elevation of lofty thought which transported the preacher should have moved the most commonplace of his hearers as if it had been a great dramatic poem full of contrast and event which poured forth over their heads, intoned in all the broad vowels and emphatic gutturals of their native speech. It is more easy to make this world contract into a sort of universal parish meeting according to the ordinary treatment of it in the pulpit; but that was not Chalmers's way.

He had, besides, another kind of work to which he

addressed himself with equal enthusiasm—an essay at legislation, or rather local statesmanship, which was of the most interesting description. In the old Scotch system of parish organisation the weekly offertory, the “plate” at the door of every church, was the appointed provision for the poor. To Chalmers it seemed that legalised public relief was destruction to all those traditions of independence to which it was the pride of a Scotsman to cling, and that this old-world provision ought to be sufficient, in the hands of brotherly charity, to supply all wants. Accordingly, the all-potent minister made a bargain with the authorities of the town, by which the entire control of his parish was left in his hands, all aid of poor-law or public charity set aside, and a densely populated district, with as many inhabitants as a principality, made over to him as to an independent ruler. A high-handed visionary, the most practical man in Scotland, Chalmers carried out his intention with complete success. “His project for providing for the support of the poor,” says a political economist, “was futile and visionary, inconsistent with principle, experience, and common sense.” But it was perfectly successful so long as he was at the head of affairs, and triumphantly demonstrated the power of loving-kindness and Christian charity to provide for even the miseries of a great town when properly watched over and organised, and with a man of genius to guide and regulate all—the grand defect, of course, in such a system being that the man of genius, the inspiring heart and intellect, cannot be found whenever he is wanted, like a poor-law surveyor. But there could not have been a more interesting experiment.

This Glasgow church was also the scene of another kind of experiment. Another great preacher, of powers as remarkable, and imagination more great than that of Chalmers, a soul of the prophet type, full of undiscovered

faculty, paused there on his way to his sphere of revelation, the ground of his triumph and martyrdom, and was not found out by the absorbed and preoccupied crowd, who were incapable perhaps of seeing more than one at a time of the great servants who laboured for them. Edward Irving, a still more rare and splendid phenomenon than Chalmers, passed a year or two as his assistant and subordinate before he went to London. With the exception of Robert Hall, these two were the greatest preachers of their day. Irving had scarcely taken his place in London, where he went in 1822, when the world found him out, and in his obscure chapel he became almost the most noted of all the notabilities of town. Even now when his story is well known and his own journals and letters have proved the nobleness and sincerity of the man, it is difficult for the world to forget that it once believed him (after having followed and stared at him as a prodigy) an impostor or a madman. And it is well known that the too lofty and unworldly strain of his great mind separated him from that homely standing-ground of fact, upon which alone our mortal footsteps are safe; and from the very exaltation of his aspiring soul brought him down into humiliation, subjection to pettier minds and to the domination of a sect, created by his impulse, yet reigning over him. The eloquence of Irving was like nothing else known in his day. Something of the lofty parallelism of the Hebrew, something of the noble English of our Bible, along with that solemn national form of poetic phraseology "such as grave livers do in Scotland use," composed the altogether irindividual style in which he wrote and spoke—his discourses to a crowded and eager audience differing little from the letters which he wrote to his wife in his study, conveying a journal of his daily proceedings to her. It was no assumed or elaborated style, but the natural utterance of a mind cast in other moulds than those

common to the men of the nineteenth century, and in himself at once a primitive prophet, a mediæval leader, and a Scotch Borderer, who had never been subject to the trimming and chopping influences of society. It is said that a recent publication of his sermons has failed to attract the public; and this is comprehensible enough, for large volumes of sermons are not popular literature. But the reader who takes the trouble to overcome the disinclination which is so apt to arrest us on the threshold of such a study, will find himself carried along by such a lofty simplicity, by such a large and noble manliness of tone, by the originality of a mind incapable of doubt, taking God at His word, instinct with that natural faith in all things divine which is, we think, in its essence one of the many inheritances of genius, though sometimes rejected and disowned—that he will not grudge the pains. He who held open before the orphan that grand refuge of the “fatherhood of God” which struck the listening statesman with wondering admiration; he who, in intimating a death, “made known to them the good intelligence that our brother had had a good voyage, so far as we could follow him or hear tidings of him,” saw everything around him with magnified and ennobled vision, and spoke of what he saw with the grandeur yet simplicity of a seer—telling his arguments and reasonings as if they had been a narrative, and making a great poetic story of the workings of the mind and its labours and consolations. In the most abstruse of his subjects this method continues to be always apparent. The sermon is like a sustained and breathless tale, with an affinity to the minute narrative of Defoe or of the primitive historians. The pauses are brief, the sentences long, but the interest does not flag: once afloat upon the stream, the reader—and in his day how much more the hearer!—finds it difficult to release himself from the full flowing tide of interest in which he

looks for the accustomed breaks and breathing places of pulpit oratory in vain.

Of all the preachers here indicated Chalmers is perhaps the only one for whom we can claim the title of a theologian in the real sense of the word. There was little science in Simeon, though the bond of doctrine was rigid; and not much in Robert Hall, whose soul and spirit were occupied in the great task of exhortation and entreaty as an ambassador of God to convey his message to men, and whose few publications, apart from his sermons, were upon subjects of the moment. Nor was Irving—with a soul all open to the miraculous, and no sense of any limit save in that withholding of God's grace which is the most terrible of punishments, the saddest proof of man's indifference or unwillingness to seek His aid—capable of the examinations and comparisons, and careful elucidation of the growth and development of systems which is necessary for a scientific theologian. The gift of preaching, or even that professional occupation with theological subjects which is necessary to every clergyman, does not involve science. Dr. Chalmers held the Chair of Philosophy in St. Andrews for several years, and was afterwards Professor of Divinity in Edinburgh, and his works on both subjects were extensive. But he has not added any original speculations or striking views to the literature either of theology or moral or political science. In the latter branch of inquiry he supported the doctrines of Malthus. In theology he adhered strongly to the orthodox traditions of the Scotch Church, and trained his students to contend for that "Headship of Christ," or spiritual independence of the Church, which resulted in what is called the Disruption of the Church of Scotland, and semi-heroic march out of it of a large number of its clergy with Chalmers at their head. When this step was taken he distinguished himself once more



by his legislative power, by the maturing of a great scheme of organisation by which his unprovided community was delivered from that dependence on the popular pleasure which is the drawback of unendowed churches. One of the most remarkable features in his character was this power at once of conceiving and putting in practice schemes such as might be very well described as "a devout imagination," had not their originator, by sheer energy and practical force, succeeded in carrying them out.

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, born 1759 ; died 1833.

Published *Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professing Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes contrasted with Real Christianity*, 1797.

With many Speeches and Pamphlets upon the Abolition of Slavery, and other subjects of the day.

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ISAAC MILNER, born 1751 ; died 1820.

*Continuation of Milner's Church History* (previous volumes by Joseph Milner), 1819.

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CHARLES SIMEON, born 1759 ; died 1836.

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ROBERT HALL, born 1764 ; died 1821.

*Christianity consistent with a Love of Freedom*, 1791.

*Apology for the Freedom of the Press*, 1793.

*Reflections on War*, 1802.

*Sentiments proper to the present Crisis*, 1803.

*On Forms of Communion*, 1815.

*The Essential Difference between Christian Baptism and the Baptism of John*, 1817.

*Sermon on the Death of Princess Charlotte*. With many other Sermons, collected with Memoir after his death, 1831-2.

THOMAS CHALMERS, born 1780 ; died 1847.

Christianity (an article in *Encyclopædia Britannica*).

Astronomical Discourses, 1817.

Commercial Discourses, 1818.

Occasional Discourses, 1819-20.

The Civic and Christian Economy of Large Towns, 1821.

Natural Theology.

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EDWARD IRVING, born 1792 ; died 1834.

For the Oracles of God.

For Judgment to Come, 1824.

Babylon ; or, Infidelity Foredoomed, 1826.

Homilies on the Sacraments, 1828.

The Last Days, 1828.

Expositions of the Book of Revelation, 1831.

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We have gone as far as space will permit in the literary history of the beginning of this century, linked as it is inextricably with the end of the last, and forming a distinct epoch in the literary life of England. The age in which we ourselves live is as yet unfulfilled. Though several great names have been placed in the records of the past since these pages were begun : and though the fame of our two greatest living poets has been sufficiently long established, and is sufficiently certain to give the perfection necessary in every picture : yet perhaps the age of Victoria has not yet "orbed into the perfect star" which it will eventually become. The epoch which we have endeavoured to treat is that of the later Georges, an age which, perhaps—though with no heroic monarch in it, or splendid court, or picturesque surroundings—will appear to posterity almost as great as that of Elizabeth. Two great schools of poetry, each enough for one cycle of history, but as opposite in their character and tendencies as the next generation generally is from that which has

immediately preceded it; a great and noble new beginning in fiction, such as has largely swayed the development at once of social life and subsequent genius: an extraordinary reconstitution of that Art of Criticism which occupies more minds, perhaps, and fills more lives than either of the preceding, and which is, indeed, so important to the nineteenth century that it has been virtually the creation of a new profession highly estimated and prosperous:—these are the principal features in the story. The rise of philosophical history among us and the great philosophical machinery of the Utilitarian system, give also weight and importance to the age as new departures, beginnings, characteristic and well defined: though on these subjects the present writer speaks with diffidence, feeling the authors indeed, but only in a smaller degree their works, to be within her sphere: yet comforted by the thought that close criticism of such works does not come within the limits of Literary History. The one branch of literature, if it can be so called, which has been altogether omitted, is that of Natural Science, the new departure in which, or it might be said, the creation of which as really enriching literature at all, belongs to the present age. A scientific treatise in the beginning of the century meant science and not literature. Even Sir Humphry Davy, its sole apostle in letters, and in himself so interesting and amiable a figure, penetrates into the second quarter of the century, and will be fitly treated along with the more recent generation, who have given to their researches a voice such as even those who are indifferent to their subjects may with pleasure hear. The Darwins, Huxleys, and Tyndalls are an original class of which previous historical records were unaware. It may be added that Narratives of Travel have also been omitted, partly from want of space, partly because in few cases can these works be ranked as pure literature.

We have said that to posterity this age will appear not inferior to the "spacious times of great Elizabeth." Great in war, with generals more triumphant and an influence more powerful than anything achieved in that reign; great in the arts, if not as applied to the embellishment and glory of life (for there is no painter in it worthy the name), yet to its service and enrichment—for railways and steamboats both began in this exuberant era; great as no age ever was before in philanthropy, for ever distinguished as the time in which Slavery was abolished—we know of no such simultaneous and splendid action of all the forces of the intellect. The same period contains what is confessedly the greatest political event in the world since our Commonwealth, the French Revolution, with all its sudden influences which have worn out in the minds of individual men, and all those slower workings, which are not exhausted nor probably ever will be. These great things belong to another province of history. Our business has been to show how the quickened life found utterance in words, and with what eloquence and energy the genius of the nation interpreted its highest thoughts and noblest life.



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